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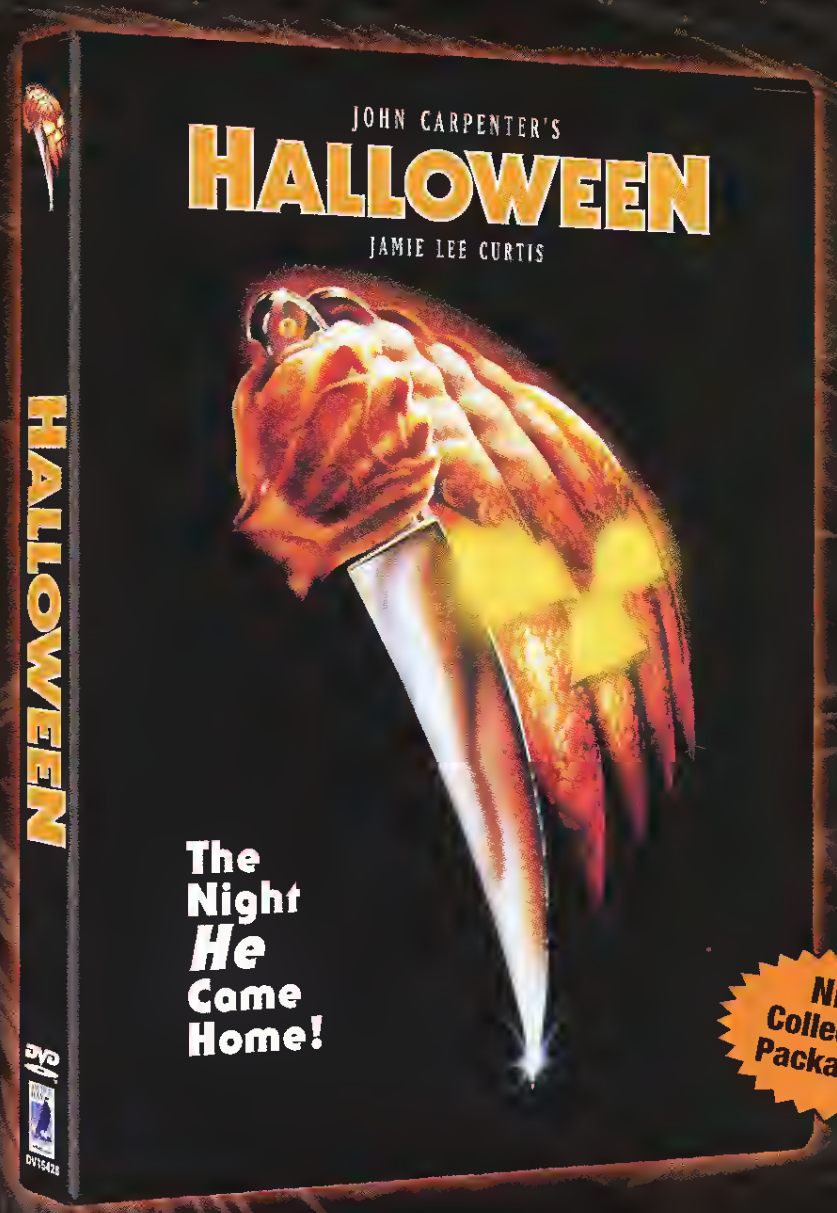
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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Love it or hate it, Rob Zombie has remade Halloween. The question on everyone's mind is: will his vision do the iconic film justice? Rue Morgue gets to the heart of the controversy in a frank interview with the rock star director.
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August 2007 Issue #70

Note From Underground



Ah, Halloween. That wonderfully spooky and festive holiday horror fans live for. It's a special time of year that marks the absolute death of summer and the beginning of a long winter. It's also the day where the dead come to life... mostly through the imaginations of children. At dusk, the tiny ghouls emerge, the chilly autumn air appropriately perfumed by the scent of decay and the shrill cries of the little ones as they run from house to house, trading scares for sugared treats.

If you're a regular reader of this space you already know that, growing up, I didn't really have the opportunity to celebrate most holidays – Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter – in the way that most others did, and in some cases, not at all. Thankfully, my parents experienced a similar European masquerade-type tradition called Maskare, in which children and adults dress up and travel from village to village collecting all kinds of handouts. For that celebration, costumes were much less fear-focused, but rather nostalgic. My mother enjoyed watching the kids seize the streets in their North American pop culture-inspired garb; she let me have the holiday, and I embraced it earnestly.

For me, October 31st wasn't just a fun sweetmeat haul, it was the standout calendar day where the rest of the world played catch-up with me and my morbid fascination with horror. I'd watch the entire city transform into a jack-o'-lantern-lit macabre carnival complete with ghost stories, costume parties and haunted houses! All in celebration of my beloved monsters and other mischievous (un)dead things.

Some of my fondest memories are of All Hallows' Eve because, in many ways, it was the only time I felt at one with my peers, who, upon returning home with their bounty (after gorging themselves on candied delights), gathered around their televisions in hopes of being startled by small screen seasonal fare like Disney's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *It's a Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* and *The Fat Albert Halloween Special*. Where we diverged, I think, was in the rest of our Halloween night programming. As you might expect, mine also included John Carpenter's *Halloween*.

For many years, *Halloween* was as much a part of Halloween for me as the makeup, candy corn and paper skeletons. The local movie station played it every year, late at night, just as the sinister grins of our carved pumpkins disappeared into the shadows. Hands still sticky with chocolate, we'd huddle under blankets as that characteristic, Carpenter-scored music swept through the living room, chilling our bones.

The movie became a part of my Halloween ritual for obvious reasons; it suited the day and tapped into the idea that evil could, in fact, come to our little town. As a kid, Michael Myers was the ultimate modern boogeyman – a voiceless, faceless, remorseless, unstoppable *thing* (once a boy, now a monster) with no real motivation for his relentless manhunt. He was no ordinary monster, nor simple, escaped lunatic; he was the madman in our closets, under our beds and in our basements. Pure evil, as Dr. Loomis would say. And he was coming to get us. After all, it was Halloween, and he was on the loose... somewhere. Why not in our town?

Myers was a household boogeyman. Most others, until that point (save for *Black Christmas*' Billy – another seasonal favourite) came from much less accessible places – Hell, outer space, or a different dimension altogether, and were most often vanquished or banished back from whence they came. But not Michael. Like Billy, he was still out there. Watching and waiting.

That said, today (after many risible sequels) Myers is about one step away from a cereal box cartoon, yet Rob Zombie's taken on the task of putting the boogey back in the Boogeyman of Haddonfield. Given that most *Halloween* fans share just as many sentimental anecdotes as I do about the original film, it goes without saying it'll be a tough gig to win over us older folks. Regardless, it seems there's one thing about the *Halloween* mythology that remains true after 29 years: Michael Myers just... won't... die.

JV

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DESIGNED BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

THANK YOU SO MUCH for your story on *The Monster Squad*! It was highly informative with no base left uncovered, from the actor interviews to the special effects construction. I've loved this movie since I was little and it's always been so hard to find, but soon I'll have my own copy to watch whenever I please. Kudos!

Shannon Turner – Dallas, Texas

AS A LONG-TIME READER, subscriber, woman, repeated rape victim AND fan of exploitation films, I take offense at Jovanka Vuckovic's categorization of the movie *I Spit on Your Grave* in the June issue of *Rue Morgue*. It's fine if you don't care for the movie, but to dismiss it because, in your opinion, it "completely objectifies and debases women, reduces them to mere sexual objects and does so with the intention to titillate, not disturb" not only ignores crucial evidence from the film that seems to disprove this statement, but also projects intentions onto the movie that are patently false. Meir Zarchi, the director of *I Spit on Your Grave* has stated numerous times that his intention in making the movie was to depict rape in all its horrible, brutal intensity and to show viewers what a terrible crime it is. You're perfectly free to believe that he failed to achieve this goal with the film, but to say the movie "[intends] to titillate, not disturb" assumes intentions that the filmmaker never had. We can disagree on our interpretations of this film, but I guess I always trusted *Rue Morgue* not to make sweeping generalizations that identify the intention of filmmakers and assume facts not in evidence. Perhaps I should have known better.

Lillian Patterson – Big Rapids, Michigan

Lillian: A lot of filmmakers say of lot of things after they've made movie to excuse themselves (case in point: Ruggero Deodato's Cannibal Holocaust*). Whether or not we choose to believe them, or decide to interpret and judge the film on its own merits, is up to us as viewers. I appreciate your view on the film but I think you may have missed the point of my editorial, which wasn't about* I Spit on Your Grave, *but rather a personal response to a rape victim, who responds to those films in a way that's very different from most. Thanks for writing – Ed.*

I WAS VERY taken with your recent editorial on rape. It pleases me to see that someone in the horror community is so willing to reach out to a fan and do their very best to help. I hope that the lady that wrote you got a lot out of your words. I did and for that, thanks. Keep fighting the good fight.

Rick Snyder – address withheld

JOVANKA DESERVES a pat on the back for putting the screws to Kerry King regarding Slayer's use of Nazi imagery. As a twenty-year, diehard Slayer fan, it was great to see an interview that was more than just a fluff piece. However, some interesting questions are raised. Kerry King claims "We're Slayer, we're controversial, we want to be controversial." He then goes on to talk about religion bashing and how that has always been his angle in the composition of Slayer's songs. Maybe I'm retarded, but picking on Christianity at this point in time is the equivalent of a sixth grader terrorizing a playground full of third graders and claiming to be a badass. With the mounting threat of terrorism in the name of Islam, wouldn't Slayer be more controversial and more rebellious by writing something anti-Muslim? Or is it only controversial and rebellious when there's no threat of a fatwa being put on your head?

Andrew D. Hernon – address withheld

BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS had an interesting article [on the comic] *Spectre* but the author mistakenly thought that the Spectre's brand of justice is only consistent with the Hebrew Bible. In fact, the New Testament presents for the first time (in terms of the canonical Bible) the concept of eternal damnation. Before that punishments were of a finite nature. The Biblical Jesus espouses eternal torment for unbelievers (John 3:18, 14:4, and others).

John McDonagh – address withheld

RE: "NOTE From Underground," *RM#68*. When it comes to ladies in the horror industry, I wholeheartedly enjoy and respect what they bring to the table as long as they are bringing something new and different. There are times that you females bring a sensibility to things us guys don't even think about. Which is a good thing when it comes to the horror genre, it's like a breath of fresh air sometimes in a field that has ideas rehashed into the same product over and over again, just titled differently. What would have been the outcome of *Ravenous*, *American Psycho*, *Near Dark* or even *Interview with the Vampire* (the book) if the view of a guy was behind it? Those pieces of art, along with others, help to create awareness in the genre itself and to enlighten other women to try their ideas and luck in the field. The best example I have is this publication. I like how Rod got it started and worked out how to lay out the main format of the magazine, but I enjoy where you are taking this mag due to your sensibilities and your open-mindedness. What you bring to this mag and the industry is invaluable. You ladies are making a difference. I don't think the women in the genre are going anywhere and will just get stronger.

Dominic Folchi – Louisville, Kentucky

I LOOK forward to getting [*Rue Morgue*] at the beginning of each month, so much so that when issue #67 hadn't shown up by mid-month, I panicked. So I called your offices and spoke with Audra, who got another copy in the mail right away. I talked with her a couple of times and each time she was patient, helpful and kind. I really appreciated her attitude and realness. Thanks again for the best horror mag there is and for being real.

Jim Bob Cook – Denver, Colorado

ZOMBIES DASHED from here to there, following victims from propane tanks a-flare. Eating them slowly and ripping them apart, it was like one disturbing work of art. How could this happen? How could this be? Didn't my family want the best for me? How could they bring me here then suddenly leave? How could they do this on Christmas Eve? It climbed to get me up in the trees – I looked more closely, it was my mom after me! My first kill and time with a gun, the last of her words were "I love you, hon." Tears and blood dripped away, then suddenly it came to be my game. I ran past them as fast as I could, running throughout the entire neighbourhood. It smelled of death and the air grew warm! I ran through the farmer's field of corn. Huffing and puffing through the rain? WTF? This is so f****** lame! Then something felt wrong – like it was watching me bad. I turned around, it was my infected dad. To be continued.

Savannah Paige Verikaitis (age 12) – Don Mills, Ontario

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

Russian gore film marks first feature from Unearthed

Cult DVD label Unearthed Films, the North American distributors of notorious video nasties like Nacho Cerda's *Aftermath* and the Japanese *Guinea Pig* series, have recently completed production on their first feature film, *Philosophy of a Knife*, by Russian director Andrey Iskanov.

"We decided to move into production for the simple fact that we can promote the best underground directors and artists the horror industry is currently breeding," explains Unearthed head Stephen Biro. "The people we are working with in Russia have wonderful careers ahead of them and by helping them with production and sales, we hope to help them gain the notoriety they deserve."

Philosophy of a Knife is the third feature from Iskanov, whose previous work includes the highly stylized and surreal art house shockers *Nails* (2003) and *Vision of Suffering* (2006), both distributed by Unearthed. Iskanov's latest is touted as the true history of Japanese Unit 731, the infamous biological warfare research and development unit of the Imperial Japanese Army active during World War II, previously the subject of Hong Kong director T.F. Mou's *Men Behind the Sun* (1987). The film chronicles Unit 731 from its beginnings in the 1930s to its demise in 1945, concentrating on atrocities committed in the Russian city of Khabarovsk and the subsequent war crimes trials. Published facts, as well as previously classified evidence, are related by an eyewitness to the court proceedings, Anatoly Protasov, a former doctor and military translator.

"We re-enact all of the experiments that happened, so it borders on the extreme, but at the same time teaches the audience exactly what was happening behind the Iron Curtain during World War II," says Biro. "The footage Iskanov shot was on video so that we could manipulate it to make it look exactly like the archival footage we found in Russia. There's almost a seamless transition between modern effects and the library footage."



Philosophy of a Knife: *Andrey Iskanov's pseudo-documentary about Japanese biological warfare during WWII*

Split into two parts and running four hours, *Philosophy of a Knife* is part documentary and part narrative film. The first half is comprised of disturbing archival and interview footage. The second is a fictional account shown from the perspectives of a young Japanese nurse who witnessed many of the horrors and a young Japanese officer who is torn between his sincere conviction that he is serving a greater purpose and the deep sympathy he feels for an imprisoned Russian girl. His life is a living hell as he is compelled to use prisoners as human guinea pigs in atrocious experiments.

The film, which stars Tetsuro Sakagami, Yukari Fujimoto and Elena Probatova, was written, directed and edited by Iskanov. Biro plans on touring it on the festival circuit and shopping it around to different film companies instead of releasing it direct to DVD through Unearthed right away.

"Since it is our first film, I feel that a bigger company can make it more of an event than we can. If all else fails, we'll release it ourselves," he says.

Biro is confident that *Philosophy of a Knife* is one of the most violent and harrowing movies ever made, noting, "This masterpiece of catastrophe took over a year and a half to complete. Be prepared for one of the most brutal films of all time."

The Gore-met



Ghost stories of M.R. James coming to North American stage

This year's World Fantasy Convention will mark the North American debut of The Nunkie Theatre Company's much-lauded one-man play *A Pleasing Terror: Two Ghost Stories by M.R. James*. The show recreates an evening of storytelling with M.R. James (1862–1936), the celebrated antiquarian and scholar who produced some of the most memorable and imitated ghost stories in the English language.

British writer/actor Robert Lloyd Parry, who portrays James, will perform two of the author's finest tales. "Canon Alberic's Scrapbook" details a bibliophile's discovery of a cursed medieval scrapbook in a tiny French village on the spurs of the Pyrenees. From its pages he learns why the sacristan does not wish for anyone to be left alone in the old church. Secondly, "The Mezzotint" involves a museum curator who obtains a mezzotint depicting an unidentified, moonlit manor house. It is a thoroughly unremarkable picture – until a cowled figure that was not there before appears in the foreground.

"This is chilling stuff! What James liked to call 'a pleasing terror.'" says Lloyd Parry, whose resemblance to the austere author is uncanny. "It is true that James was something of a reserved Edwardian gentleman, yet he certainly knew how to make his readers feel uncomfortable with bits that are still today undeniably gruesome."

A Pleasing Terror has received praise from European audiences since December 2005. The 80-minute show is intimate in nature with minimal sound effects and music. Lloyd Parry recreates James' candlelit study, performing the stories, as if spontaneously, from the comfort of an old, wingback chair. At his side sits a small table upon which rest a decanter of port and a jar of pipe tobacco. Numerous books lay open at his feet – the general impression is an evening in the presence of the author himself.

"Aside from Christopher Lee doing a turn as James for a BBC2 television series in 2000, this sort of thing has never been done before," explains Lloyd Parry. "I've performed the show close to 100 times in England and Ireland, and so far it's been very successful. I'm looking forward to bringing M.R. James to an American audience."



Photography by Ruth Horry

Ghost Stories: *Robert Lloyd Parry as M.R. James in the one-man play* ***A Pleasing Terror***

Published over a century ago, James' ghost stories have had a major influence on writers such as H.P. Lovecraft, Fritz Leiber and Ramsey Campbell, among others. His *Collected Ghost Stories* (1931) has never gone out of print and includes tales that were originally penned to be read aloud. For Lloyd Parry, a James fan since his father introduced the stories to him in his youth, a show that recreated the tradition of M.R. James' ghost story readings seemed a natural progression.

Parry reveals of the play's genesis, "In 2005 I found myself working in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge where James once catalogued old manuscripts. He worked there around the same time that he wrote 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook.' You can imagine him in the museum late at night, shadows threatening his pool of candlelight, wondering whether those creaks outside the door were footsteps – or something else. A thrill of remembrance rushed through me when Canon Alberic's demon finally makes its appearance – the idea of doing such show was simply too good to pass up."

One wonders if after spending a lifetime writing ghost stories whether James himself believed in ghosts. "Actually, he was asked that by a friend on his deathbed," says Lloyd Parry. "His reply was, 'Yes, there are such things – but we don't know the rules.'"

A Pleasing Terror: Two Ghost Stories by M.R. James will make its North American debut at the 2007 World Fantasy Convention (November 1–4), followed by more shows in and around New England. Dates and ticket prices to be confirmed. Updated information can be found at nunkie.co.uk.

Brian J. Showers



Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

cosmichex.com
Looking for a long lost, out-of-print film that's never been released to DVD? Well, if the title you're seeking is over fifteen-years-old Cosmic Hex may be able to help. For dirt cheap, visitors to the site can download a variety of copyright-free vintage content including, but not limited to, horror, sci-fi and exploitation flicks. Dig in!

axwoundzine.com
Dedicated to creating a "dialogue about gender" in the horror genre, Hannah D. Forman's pet project Ax Wound consists of both a website and a more traditional paper 'zine. The online component features a small collection of essays, interviews and reviews. Ax Wound is also currently seeking submissions, so creep on over for more details.

damneddollies.com
Full of fire and brimstone, Montreal-based artist Dana De Kuyper's possessed poppet broaches are cute as all Hell. There are ten little handmade devil-dolls in her collection, which also appear on bags, T-shirts and hoodies. Pin one to your naked, twitching flesh today.

retrocrush.com/scary/index.html
Whether you agree or disagree with their list, the folks at retrocrush.com have compiled their 100 scariest movie moments. Despite sticking to mostly mainstream fare, there are quite a few non-horror surprises tossed into the mix. If nothing else, it's a great conversation/argument starter!

newgrounds.com/portal/view/360724
With the slogan "Evolve, Infect, Kill!" there's much to love about Pandemic, an online turn-based strategy game where you unleash a deadly virus in an attempt to eradicate mankind. Evolve your plague as you play by selecting symptoms and manners of transmission. Get diseased!



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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
E-mail a link to: **roadkill@rue-morgue.com**

Interactive zombie film goes for record

You just knew that someone would go for it eventually – *Day of the Living Dying*, a horror film that began production on June 6, is attempting to set a world record for the most zombies ever onscreen.

"It started at Film Fantastic in Australia many months back," explains actor/director Dennis Baker, the "brains" behind the project. "We set up a blue screen and filmed people in makeup and costume against it. We've been doing the same at film festivals across the US, and people have been sending in their videos by mail or uploading [them] to gofish.com. We've even gotten some footage from various zombie walks."

While there are already a few internet series where viewers can participate, *Day of the Living Dying* takes the concept to a whole new level. It also has the added benefit of appealing to some of the most diehard fans in the film world.

"Zombie fans are like Elvis fans," Baker says with some bemusement. "They're really deep into it."

Baker should know; the former Denver resident, who recently relocated to new digs in Nashville, has now put his feet solidly in both camps. He's best known for his Elvis manqué Denton Rose, the big-haired private eye who specializes in ghost hunting and time travel on his pseudonymous internet television show. While he's done low-budget horror films before (most recently *Woodland Haunting: A True Ghost Story* and *The Woodland Haunting 2*), *Day of the Living Dying* has given Baker an unusual amount of media attention.

"It's based on global warming," he explains, just a slight hint of the King's drawl creeping through. "A group of scientists go up to the Arctic to research the problem, where they find an ancient virus that thaws out from under the ice. Typical of most zombie films, it's unleashed across the earth and a small group of people try and escape from the zombie plague."

The director says that much of the footage he receives will be used in worldwide news clips during the film, and that the quality of the entries has been surprisingly high.

Baker achieved a certain amount of notoriety by winning on the gofish.com online television show *America's Dream Date* while in the Denton Rose persona. He got a trip to Paris and a television/film deal from GoFish out of it, as well as attention from Hollywood. Baker was contacted by Dreamworks about the possibility of playing the title role in *Gullible's Travels*, a film slated for release in 2009.



Day of the Living Dying *Featuring... you*

"I'm not sure it's going to happen," he laughs. "They're not crazy about the Elvis angle. I told them I'd do it without the wig, but they may not like me so much."

Day of the Living Dying is much in the same vein as Denton Rose – more of a good-natured jab at the genre than any sort of serious horror film.

"Our zombies will be a little more, uh, user friendly," says Baker. "They have most of their personalities intact, and when they rise again they mostly try to retain their day jobs. Guys just going to work, y'know?"

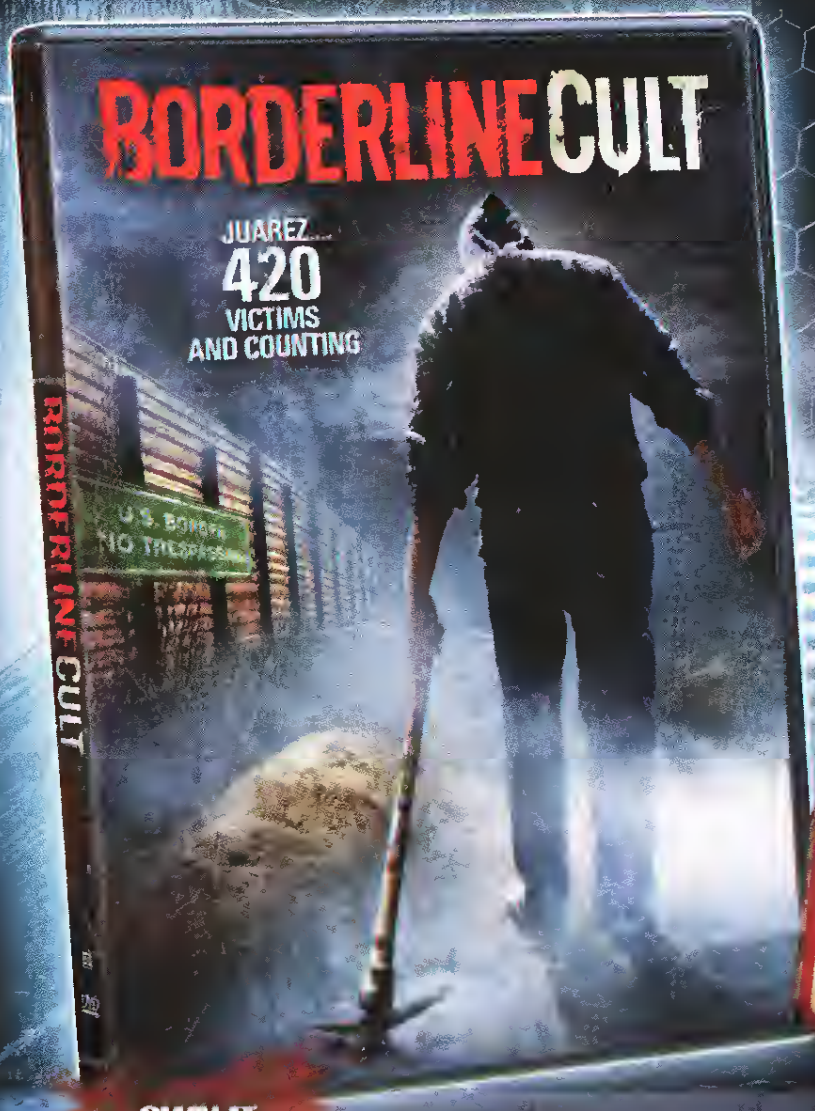
At the moment, the filmmakers are also trying to figure out exactly who holds the record for most zombies in a film. "It's not as though it's the kind of thing that anyone had ever considered before," Baker notes.

He hopes to have the film – which has, believe it or not, the help of Oscar-winning makeup artist Peter Frampton (*Braveheart*) on it – completed by the end of the summer, with distribution being negotiated as of press time.

Tom Murray



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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats
Morbid Facts

✚ The Caribbean island of Martinique had a rather unusual nickname in the late 1880s, it was called Le pays des revenants (The Country of the Comers-Back), a handle that specifically references zombies.

✚ Olga Baclanova, the actress who played the villainess Cleopatra in Tod Browning's *Freaks*, built her own father's coffin after his death during the Russian revolution.

✚ Doctor-assisted suicide is legal in the state of Oregon, assuming the patient is terminally ill, mentally competent and can self-administer the lethal medication. In order for the doctor to provide the drug, the patient must ask twice verbally and once in writing.

✚ Francis Ford Coppola once worked as Roger Corman's assistant, earning $90 a week.

✚ Phonophobia is defined as "a morbid fear of sounds including your own voice."

✚ Philip Nutman, author of the acclaimed horror novel *Wet Work*, began his professional writing career at age fifteen.

✚ Before modern advances in post-mortem examinations it was believed that one could tell if a person was poisoned by opening the stomach of a corpse and tasting the fluids within. If they were bitter, then a murder had occurred.

✚ Peter Jackson didn't always want to be a director. From the age of eight 'til he was in his early twenties, he dreamed of working in special effects.

✚ Following the public hanging of Leo Frank in Georgia in March of 1913, the rope from the noose and his restraints were cut into small segments, which were then handed out to the crowd as souvenirs.

✚ Due to its ultra low budget, the crew of *The Legend of Boggy Creek* was primarily made up of high school students.

✚ Some of the ingredients called for in love potions from days of old include baked doves, finely ground mice feet and the blood of bats.

✚ Hans Janowitz, co-screenwriter of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, got his inspiration for the film's story after discovering that he might have seen a murderer leaving the scene of the crime. He later saw the same man again at the dead child's funeral.

✚ In June 2007, a Middlefield, Connecticut woman was found dead in her home after being last seen alive almost eight years earlier by neighbours. The autopsy failed to reveal the year of her death but all the calendars, food products and newspapers found in the home were dated 1999 or earlier.

Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

BLOOD BATHS



1. *The Descent*
Subterranean body part soup.

2. *Carrie*
Porcine plasma prom prank.

3. *Evil Dead II*
Drenched by deadite juice.

4. *Blade*
Vampiric dance floor downpour.

5. *Dead Alive*
Lionel's lawnmower massacre.

6. *Hostel: Part II*
Scythe-inflicted sanguinary shower.



James Fisher **zircocircus.com**

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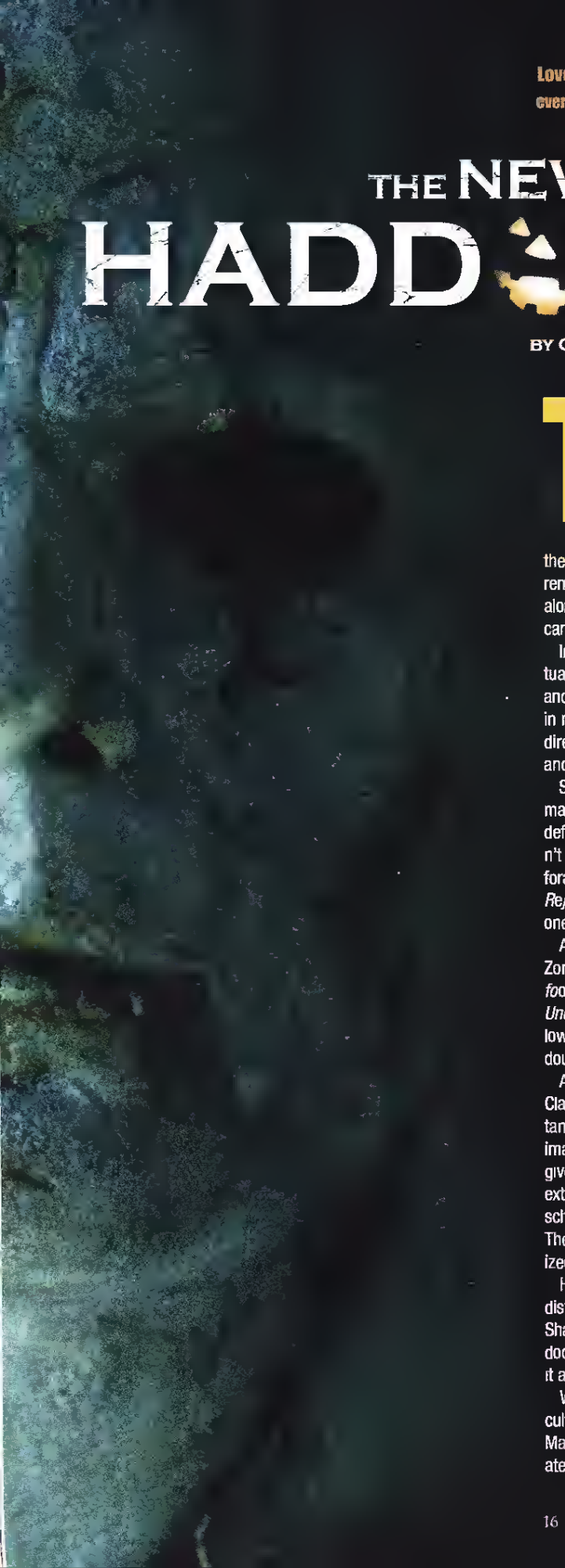
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Love it or hate it, ROB ZOMBIE has remade *HALLOWEEN*. The question on everyone's mind is: will he do the iconic original justice? *Rue Morgue* gets to the heart of the controversy in a frank interview with the rock star director.

THE NEW BOOGEYMAN OF HADDONFIELD

BY CHRIS ALEXANDER • INTERVIEW BY JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

The heated debate surrounding the spate of high-gloss Hollywood remakes of classic '70s and '80s horror films is as endless as the conveyer belt regularity of the movies themselves… and almost as monotonous. Though financially motivated big-budget opportunists are constantly raiding the back catalogue of "untouchable" genre gems with the suspect motivation of re-imagining them for a new generation, the real sore spot shouldn't be the fact that the remakes exist. If you worship at the altar of George Romero's 1978 *Dawn of the Dead*, for example, then a thousand remakes and rip-offs shouldn't taint that passion play. And when an artist comes along that truly understands and adores the picture they chose to plunder, the results can occasionally be rather sublime.

In the case of such auteur-driven vehicles as David Cronenberg's savagely intellectual version of *The Fly* (1986), John Carpenter's own gooey take on *The Thing* (1982) and Philip Kaufman's urban riff on *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), the remakes in many ways trump the originals, building on established themes and applying their director's very personal obsessions and agendas to the films, making them stand out and take on lives of their own.

So when Dimension Films announced last year that horror rock megastar and filmmaker Rob Zombie had been awarded the assignment of remaking John Carpenter's definitive 1978 indie slasher hit *Halloween* (in theatres August 31), fan response wasn't nearly as vicious as it could have been. No matter your take on Zombie's previous forays into horror filmmaking (2003's *House of 1000 Corpses* and 2005's *The Devil's Rejects*), there is no disputing the man's absolute devotion to the genre. Nor can anyone deny that he has a creative language that is distinctly his own.

Add to these films his musical career with pioneering monster metal outfit White Zombie (and as a solo artist), his comic book collaborations with Steve Niles on *Bigfoot* and *The Nail*, and a recent stint as a horror host on Turner Classic Movies' *TCM Underground*, and it's arguable that no single modern artist has worked harder to drag lowbrow horror culture into the mainstream. Rob Zombie truly does live, and will no doubt die, by the pop culture sword he swings so heavily.

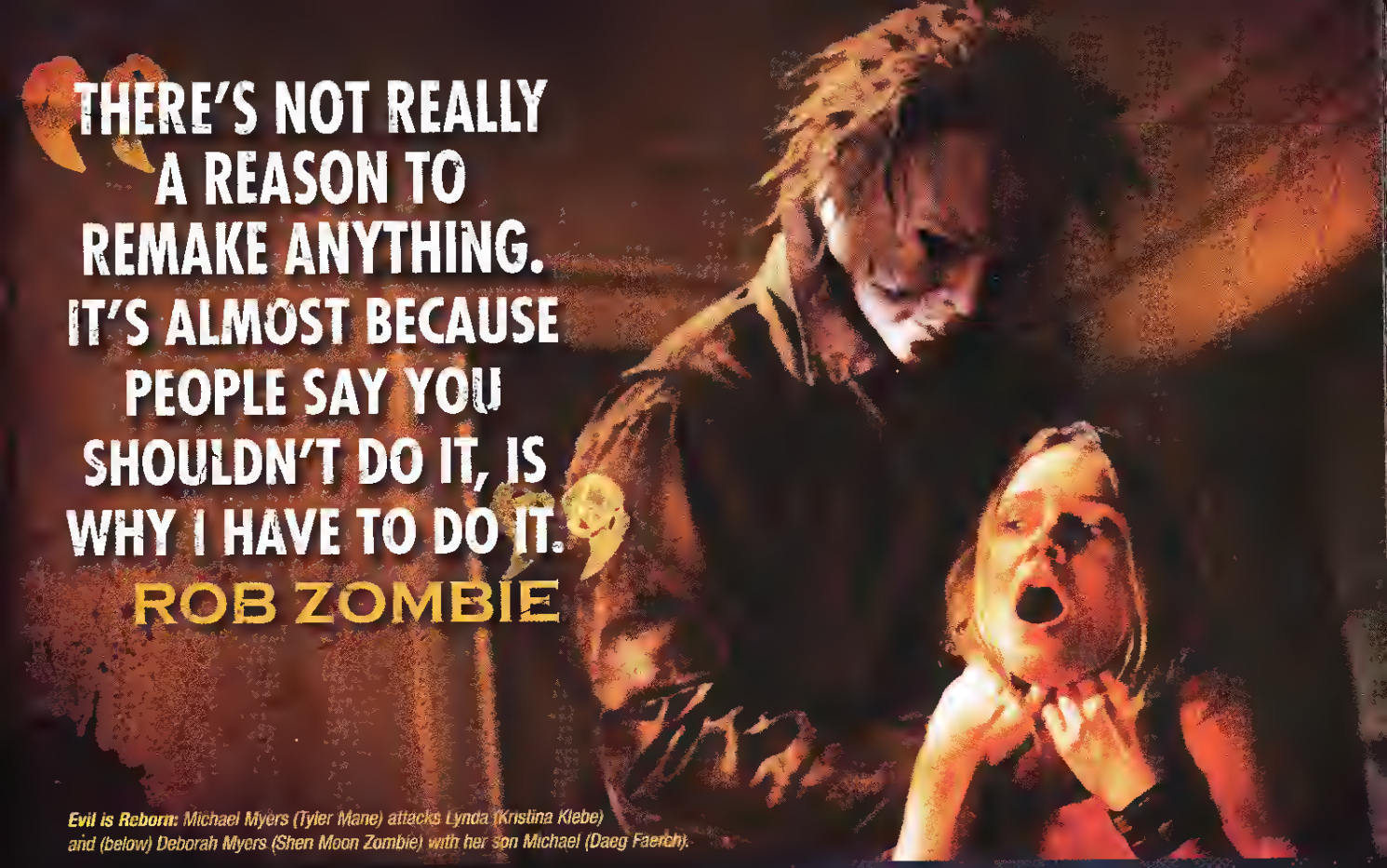
And yet the idea of this blend of Charles Manson, Frankenstein's Monster and Jed Clampett being the man responsible for a relaunch of what is not only the most important masked killer movie of all time but, at its core, an elegant, restrained, almost minimalist thriller, has upset more than a few purists. Thus far, Zombie the director has given us just two self-referential and admittedly somewhat pretentious (though extremely admired in many circles) cult throwbacks to '70s trap-'em-and-kill-'em schlock, featuring the kinds of inbred goons that give trailer park living a bad name. These loud, violent, completely mean-spirited feature-length rock videos have polarized horror fans everywhere.

How can this filmmaker's sensibility be transplanted to the tale of the young, deeply disturbed Michael Myers and his evolution into the mask-wearing killer known as The Shape? According to the hirsute filmmaker, by simply starting anew, ignoring the dodgy sequels and creating something completely fresh while being true to the spirit and intentions of *Halloween*'s mastermind, John Carpenter.

Whether or not Zombie has succeeded at his ambitious pursuit – which features cult favourite Malcolm McDowell in the role of Dr. Loomis and the hulking 6'11" Tyler Mane as The Shape – is another question. *Rue Morgue* corners the always opinionated Zombie to flesh out our advance look at the most talked about horror remake yet.

THERE'S NOT REALLY A REASON TO REMAKE ANYTHING. IT'S ALMOST BECAUSE PEOPLE SAY YOU SHOULDN'T DO IT, IS WHY I HAVE TO DO IT.

ROB ZOMBIE



Evil is Reborn: *Michael Myers (Tyler Mane) attacks Lynda (Kristina Klebe) and (below) Deborah Myers (Sheri Moon Zombie) with her son Michael (Daeg Faerch).*

For the record, is this a remake, a sequel, or both?

It's definitely not a sequel. I hate all the terms – re-imagining, revisiting – it's my own take on *Halloween*.

In the past you've said you're not interested in remakes, what changed your mind?

Yeah, I did feel that way in the past, but I got over it. When I was approached to do this, I looked at it and thought I wanted to make the movie because I thought Michael Myers was a great character. It wasn't like when Christopher Lee became Dracula, where they were continuing from Lugosi's Dracula. We're just doing it again with a different approach.

It's definitely a challenge for you because it seems that at least 50 percent of horror fans are vehemently opposed to the idea of remaking Halloween.

I think the only reason to get upset about a remake was if there was some kind of law that dictated that, "Okay, if a movie gets remade, then all of the copies of the original must be now destroyed!" Then get upset.

What's in it creatively for you?

I'm not even attempting to take the original *Halloween* and make it better. I'm just doing my own thing. Basically reinventing Myers as a different kind of monster.

You seem to be interested in killers that dress up, so to speak. House of 1000 Corpses and The Devil's Rejects are full of very charismatic murderers. Archetypically, what's so attractive about a killer who tries to present himself as a certain something, as opposed to a human being who just kills other human beings, such as Norman Bates?

I just love monsters. Whether it's Frankenstein, King Kong or whatever. When I was a kid, and we went to see horror movies, we didn't really refer to them as horror movies, they were monster movies. While I love *Psycho*, I'm just much more into the kind of monsters that have a really memorable, enduring presence.

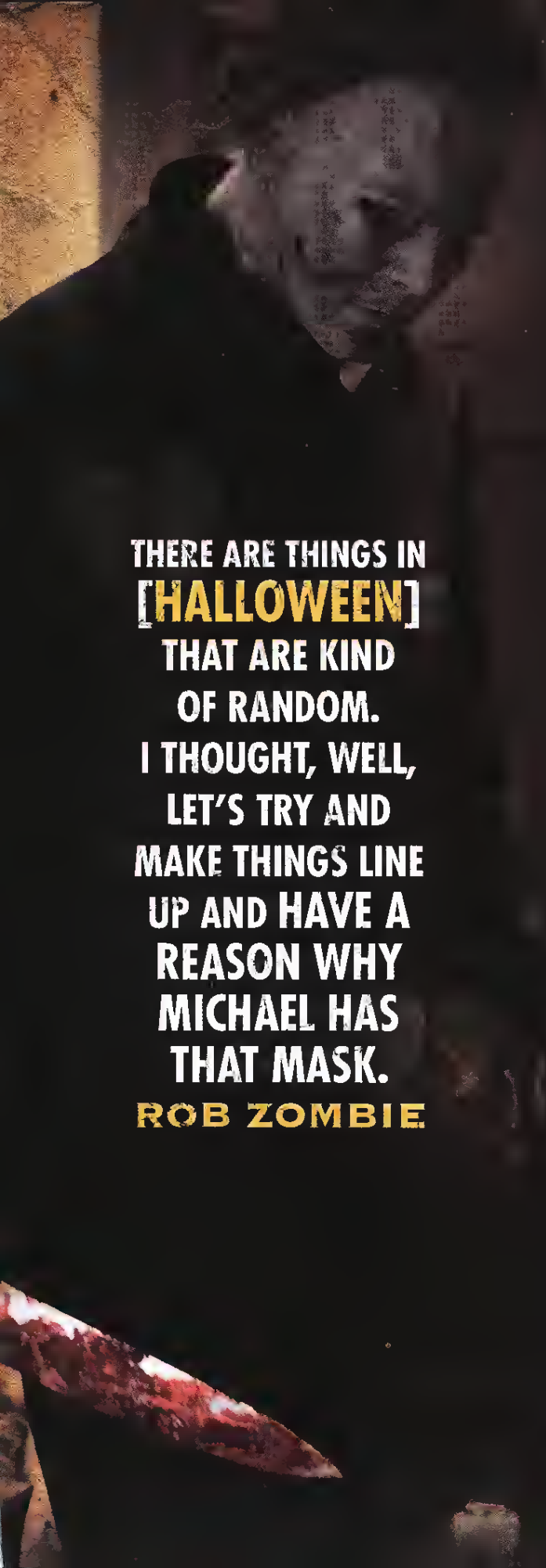
People make a big deal about that mask. In the first film the mask was just stolen from a store. From what I've seen in the movie, you've added a back story about where the mask comes from.

You know, I hate referencing the original because it makes it seem like if I talk about it and I change something that it means that I didn't like that movie. But there are things in [*Halloween*] that are kind of random. I thought, well, let's try and make things line up and have a reason *why* Michael has that mask. It's not just like oh, he robbed a hardware store so if they didn't have that mask then he'd be wearing a Ronald Reagan mask 'cause that's the one he stole? It funny too how people analyze things now. People didn't analyze things so heavily when that movie came out.

That's the new IMDb-age horror fan for you...

Man, we had a test screening the other night, which actually went really well, but I was sitting in with the focus group. It's very bizarre because the way they analyze and pick at something, it becomes so insane. But they forget if you look at the first movie there's stuff that doesn't





THERE ARE THINGS IN [HALLOWEEN] THAT ARE KIND OF RANDOM. I THOUGHT, WELL, LET'S TRY AND MAKE THINGS LINE UP AND HAVE A REASON WHY MICHAEL HAS THAT MASK.
ROB ZOMBIE

make sense. Why would he drive? How does he fucking know how to drive? And [for Loomis] to stop and make a phone call in a hundred-mile stretch, at exactly the place where Michael dumped his hospital gown? And he finds a *matchbook*! And [Micheal] robs a hardware store in the middle of the day and the alarm is still going at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. [Laughs] What? No one was there? There's also a scene in that movie where a little kid runs into Michael and he's wearing the white mask, but he hasn't even stolen it yet. And you get into the focus groups and analyze all these tiny little details, it's like, come on buddy, Jesus!

Slasher films haven't been scary for a long time. What's the key to making Michael Myers frightening again?
I think the key is: I'm really not a fan of all of the *Halloween* sequels. I think they fell into the '80s slasher movie vibe, which I was never really into. These days I don't really know what makes anyone scared, you get bombarded by so much stuff. But I thought the key was to make it more *real*, and to make it more gritty and gnarly. Those movies seem really glossy and they became very much about teens, they just didn't seem like they had a scary vibe to them anymore. And I didn't want to take the Carpenter approach. His thing was, like, don't show a lot, make it suspenseful like Hitchcock, and that's exactly what he did. That's what he does, but that's not really what I do.

So you're not going to keep the film in the tradition of the suspenseful, atmospheric slasher. Are you adding more gore?
I never really was a fan of super gory stuff like heads getting chopped off and eyeballs popping out of people's heads or things that are super extreme. For me, as soon as things become that extreme it almost becomes like a cartoon. It becomes gross and funny and kind of ridiculous. But I do think you can make it very violent and intense without really showing that much. Some of the most intense scenes that people who have seen the film have mentioned – there's hardly anything [gory] to be seen in it. It's just [that] the actors are really selling what's going on. There's a moment with Annie, Danielle [Harris'] character. It's not really that he's doing anything to her, it's the way she's crying and whimpering; it's hard to watch because it seems real. It's not like "insert of spike going through someone's head" where the whole movie stops for an insert. I don't like that.

The music of Halloween is hugely emblematic. How are you going to approach the music with your film?
Two ways. We're using new stuff and pieces of the old stuff whenever it's appropriate. Certain times it works really good and certain times it doesn't. Nothing concerning this movie have I been taking lightly. Everything is a fine line at all times between trying to deliver something fresh and new that people can get excited about while trying to hold on to enough classic pieces so that it retains the vibe of why you probably liked it in the first place.

Back to those sequels you mentioned. Over eight movies the Michael Myers mythology has developed to include things such as secret Celtic cults. Are you incorporating any of that existing mythology?
I don't care about any of that stuff.

It seems like you're focusing a lot on Myers' early years instead.
If there's a reason to remake this – wait, as soon as you say that, it sounds wrong – there's not really a reason to remake anything. It's almost because people say you shouldn't do it, is why I have to do it. But there was one thing that I thought you could do, [which] was: Donald Pleasence is always talking about things that Myers did but you never see it. Rather than a POV through a clown mask and Deborah Hill's hand waving in front of the camera and suddenly there's a kid that never talks again, I thought, why don't we go through it all and it becomes this intense experience? I swear to god if I didn't tell you what this movie was and you watched the first hour of it, you wouldn't know what it was.

It appears you've changed Michael's entire family life.
Yeah, I made him sort of like a normal kid. People always say, "What I think is scary

When Moustapha Akkad, producer of the *HALLOWEEN* series, died unexpectedly in 2005, his son inherited the franchise. MALEK AKKAD maps out the road back to Haddonfield.



AT HOME WITH A MASKED KILLER

by James Grainger

Most twelve-year-olds would have run screaming to the nearest closet or fortified basement at the sight of iconic ghoul Michael Myers. But for a young Malek Akkad, son of the late Moustapha Akkad, executive producer of the *Halloween* series, the masked madman of Haddonfield was practically a friend of the family.

"I was often on the set for *Halloween II*," Malek recalls, "so I wasn't scared when Michael Myers walked out. In fact, I have very fond memories of hanging out with Dick Warlock [who played Myers in the second film] and Jamie Lee [Curtis] – who is a remarkable woman – and the amazing John Carpenter."

Malek began working full-time in film as a teenager, serving as an associate producer of the *Halloween* series from *Halloween IV* on, so it was only natural that he should inherit the producer's role for the ninth *Halloween* film after his father and 34-year-old sister Rima were killed in a 2005 terrorist bombing in Jordan. But growing up with the series didn't make it any easier to choose a creative team for the latest installment.

"I definitely feel the responsibility to protect the franchise," says Malek. "Every time you're messing with a classic like *Halloween*, which is so close to people's hearts, especially my father's, it can be difficult."

The road back to Haddonfield was bumpy even before Moustapha's death. Trancas Films, the production company started by Moustapha in 1977 which owns the rights to the series, began hearing pitches for a ninth *Halloween* film three and a half years ago. After three sets of writers failed to breathe sufficient life into the franchise, Malek decided it was time to return to Myers' roots.

"We weren't too happy with the way things were going and started thinking maybe it was time to do a remake," he reveals. "By part nine, with all of the outstanding story threads you have to answer, it all gets a little convoluted."

When Bob Weinstein called Malek and asked what he thought of Rob Zombie as a potential director, Malek was intrigued. He also realized that Moustapha would have approved of Zombie's vision.

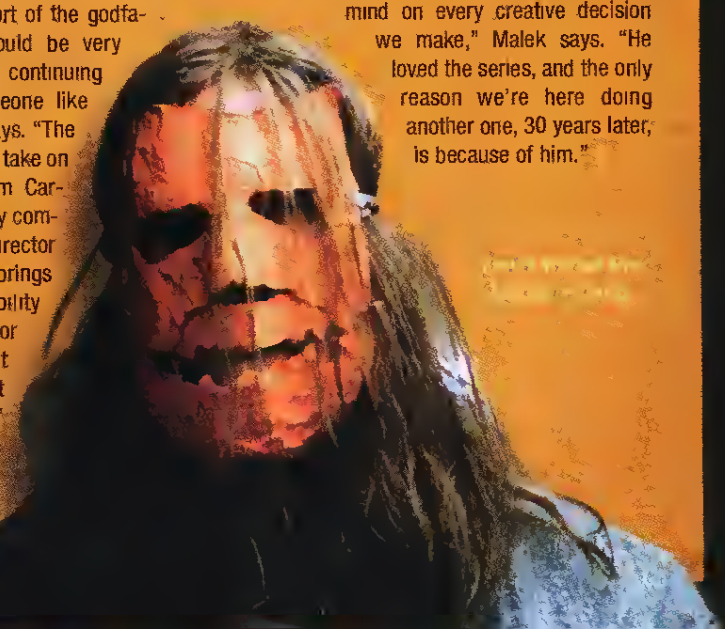
"My father, who is sort of the godfather of the series, would be very proud to see the series continuing in this way, with someone like Rob at the helm," he says. "The great thing is that Rob's take on it is very different from Carpenter's. ... Rob is really coming into his own as a director and a horror auteur. He brings a modern-day sensibility that had been lacking for some of the recent sequels. He has great respect for the original."

Because of Zombie's involvement, Malek feels that diehard fans won't dismiss the film as a quick cash grab in a market already glutted with often substandard remakes of horror classics. As he sees it, two generations of fans never got the thrill of seeing Michael Myers' homecoming on the big screen, and Rob is just the man to bring them back.

Malek also notes that any thought of further sequels will be left to the fans. "We've always said that it's the fans that keep this alive, and if they want to come out and support this one, then you never know. I'm not giving any plot away by saying that it's a possibility."

Any potential sequel ideas will also fall under the long shadow cast by Moustapha.

"The memory of my father weighs on my mind on every creative decision we make," Malek says. "He loved the series, and the only reason we're here doing another one, 30 years later, is because of him."





THE CURSE CONTINUES: HALLOWEEN FAN FILMS

by Dave Alexander

As a horror fan, Rob Zombie is living the dream – he's been given the keys to the kingdom of his favourite franchise and the go-ahead to envision his ultimate version of *Halloween*. But you don't have to be a rock star director with studio backing to indulge your love of a classic. These days, it's easier than ever to make your own entry in a popular movie series.



The ever-expanding supernova of internet fan culture, increasingly inexpensive and high-quality consumer-level filmmaking equipment, plus good old nostalgia have given rise to an era of cinematic re-appropriation, remixing and re-imagining. In short, fan films. For example, type "*Star Wars* fan film" into Google and you'll get nearly 85,000 hits – links to spoofs, alternate storylines, entirely new tales set in the *SW* universe and even the famous Jar-Jar-free cut of the *Phantom Menace*. Content *by* fans *for* fans.

Horror geeks have followed suit, creating and often posting online, fan films dedicated to franchises such as *The Evil Dead*, *Friday the 13th*, *Hellraiser*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Re-Animator*, *The Ring*, *Resident Evil*, *Saw* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. None of these have proven as popular as *Halloween*, though. Search for "*Halloween* fan film" through Google or YouTube and you'll find a large number of titles, including *Escape From Haddonfield*, *Evilution of Michael Myers*, *Halloween: The Boogeyman*, *Halloween: A New Season*, *Halloween: Samhain*, *Hallows Eve*, *Return to Haddonfield*, and so on.

Their proliferation makes perfect sense – making a *Halloween* fan film is even easier than making a zombie film. All you really need is a suburban setting, a pair of coveralls, a knife and that ubiquitous white mask. From a narrative standpoint, on one hand it's the basic boogeyman story that predates the Brothers Grimm, and on the other hand, the many sequels have built a mythology that has asked more questions than they have answered. The world of *Halloween* offers both straightforward storytelling opportunities and fertile ground for further mythological exploration.

Thirty-two-year-old Des Shaw is one of those diehard fans who decided to explore that mythology when he wrote, directed (as T.J. Shaw) and starred in the feature-length *Halloween: Inferno*, made in '98.

"We wanted to take the mythos and tear it up," he explains, "to make a true fan film and do all the outlandish things we, as diehard fans, would love see but knew we never would."

With a video camera, some eager friends and about $2500, he shot the movie in and around his hometown of Edmonton, Alberta, substituting its often-gritty urban locales for Washington D.C. *Inferno* sees Shaw himself starring as David Loomis (a character of his own creation), son of Myers' nemesis Dr. Sam Loomis (the character made famous by the late Donald Pleasence). It takes place decades after the original film and goes deep into conspiracy territory as David teams up with Myers' own daughter Jennifer Sorenson (Trish MacDonald), who was the result of a military experiment using Myers' DNA to create super-soldiers. David constantly fights to control her inherited homicidal instincts as they run from, and eventually get captured by, a bunch of suits (led by the mysterious Man in Black) – covert baddies who have also resurrected Myers. The "Curse of Thorn" subplot (an ancient curse where the bearer would have to ritually sacrifice his own family) that factors heavily in the series' sixth film, *Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers*, is wrapped up in the proceedings too.

"When it comes to Michael Myers, there's much left to the imagination," says Shaw, who made an hour-long prequel to *Inferno* called *Halloween: The Offspring*. "You can shape his evil in a variety of ways and push it in different directions. *Halloween 5* and *6* left a lot of unanswered questions and plenty of paths for that story to take."

Other fan filmmakers have also interpreted the world of *Halloween* in a variety of ways. For example, there's *Slipping Away*, a silent black and white short that has Myers stalking a victim but is



the mask

more art film than slasher flick, *Halloween Revisited*, which has Myers stopping in at another neighbourhood house to terronze a different babysitter on the same night as the events of the original film; *Hallows Eve*, standard stalk 'n' slash fare with a modern sense of ironic humour; and *The Last Halloween: The Death of Michael Myers*, which places the viewer in the head of Myers, as he succumbs to the voices telling him to kill. Shaw figures there's more than 100 *Halloween* fan films out there.



"It's the mystique it carries," he says of the phenomenon. "It's not as heavy-handed as *Friday the 13th*, not flashy like *Elm Street*. It's closer to home. It could be *your* town, *your* city."

The fan films, many of which, like *Inferno*, were screened at a 25th anniversary convention celebrating the original film in Pasadena, California a few years ago, range from a few minutes long to feature-length. Most of them are under-lit, full of amateur actors in their mid-20s to mid-30s and feature a Myers who is a little, well, smaller than you probably remember him.

But they're all also clearly in love with director John Carpenter and late producer Debra Hill's monstrous creation. Almost all of the fan films fetishize the infamous mask through creepy close-ups, and great effort is made to recreate those terrifying tableaus of Myers (a k.a. "The Shape") framed at the end of hallways, the top of staircases or in windows – defining Boogeyman imagery that taps into our deepest childhood fears of strangers.

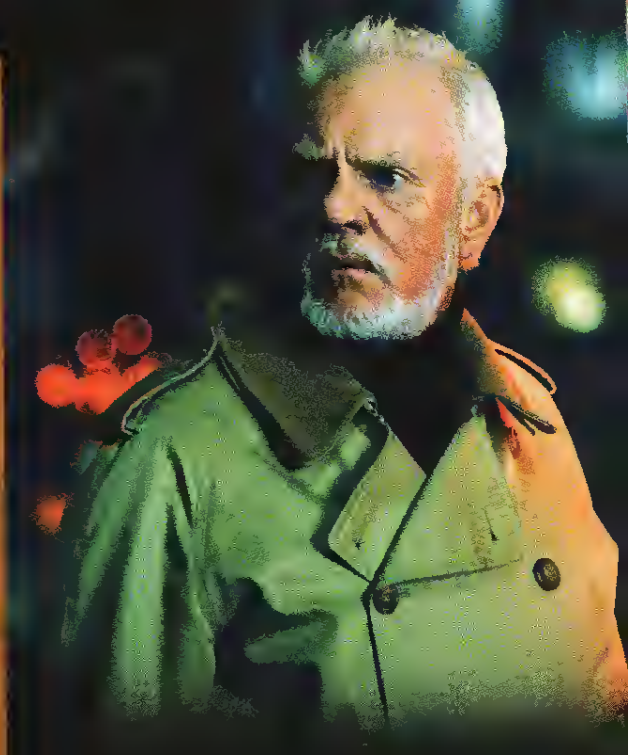


For the fans who put out their films – their versions of someone else's intellectual property – it's a non-profit venture done mainly for fun. But fan films are also sometimes a good way for young filmmakers to get noticed. Shaw, who has moved on to his own original projects, points out, "We originally did *Inferno* back in 1998 to get our feet wet in filmmaking, to see what we were capable of. We showed it once and gave out some copies. We thought that would be it. But the fates keep resurrecting this thing ever since. We did the Special Edition in 2003 for the [Pasadena] convention and that was all. We just ride it at this point, it goes where it wants."

The questions remains: does a hardcore fan like Shaw think Zombie can pull off the ultimate *Halloween* fan film?

"Rob is the man," he confirms. "I have little to no doubt that it will be fantastic. He gets it and has the tools to pull it off."

For more information on Halloween: Inferno *and* *Halloween: The Offspring*, *visit blog.myspace.com/halloweeninferno.*



Malcolm McDowell steps into the trench coat-clad character made famous by Donald Pleasence.

is that he's a normal kid from a regular family," and I'm like, why is that scary? You're just saying that because that's what they did in the original movie. Now if he was the son of a fucking monkey tamer in a zoo, they'd say, "I think it's scary because he's the son of a fucking monkey tamer in a zoo!" People keep saying, "I think it should be this way" because that's what they saw. I made them normal, but not like rich, clean suburbia normal. I thought what was better was to make it more like the life I remember. A little more lower middle class. It's not like hillbillies or any of that shit that people like to say. He's a normal kid that you'll see and you'll go, "Oh, that reminds me of me and every fucking kid I went to school with." To me, the perfect family gone bad is like, meh, whatever.

Why did you choose Malcolm MacDowell for the Loomis role?

It was hard to find people that I thought would fit the bill because everybody's like, "Nobody can replace Donald Pleasence!" How many horror fans keep saying that they were huge Donald Pleasence fans before *Halloween*? Like, did they ever even hear of Donald Pleasence before *Halloween*? And Malcolm seemed perfect; he's got this presence and this charisma that's different than Donald Pleasence because you don't want to have somebody that *looks like* Donald Pleasence imitating Donald Pleasence, that just seems stupid. Malcolm was friends with Donald so he didn't want to imitate him. Malcolm's never even seen *Halloween*.

What?

He's never seen it. That's the other funny thing in making this movie, when you listen to the horror fans they seem to think that every person on the planet Earth has seen *Halloween*. I never really thought about it but it's amazing how many people haven't seen it.



(Clockwise from top) Mason Strode (Pat Skipper) meets Michael, Rob Zombie on set in Myers' cell and Laurie Strode (Scout Taylor-Compton) makes a grave discovery.

Have you made him watch it?

No, I told him not to watch it. You gotta think [that] Donald Pleasance wasn't imitating somebody, you know? It's amazing how many times [McDowell] would sort of do things that were kind of similar without knowing it. He plays him differently. He plays him a little more like you're not really sure if Dr. Loomis is trying to help Michael, or turns a corner where he's trying to exploit Michael. There's an element we play off a little bit with someone like, say, a Vincent Bugliosi, who's just a prosecutor until he gets the Manson case. Then he's a fucking superstar. And that would be kind of the thing here. Dr. Loomis, he's just some fucking child psychologist 'til he hits the motherload with a Michael Myers.

In the original movie, Loomis sees Michael as the embodiment of evil. He seems like he's a little nuts himself.

Yeah, Donald Pleasence plays Loomis as if he's just as much of a kook as Michael Myers, running around like a maniac screaming all the time.

"Death has come to your little town, Sheriff!"

[Laughs] He's pretty scary himself! That's why in going through the early days of Michael, we can explain Loomis and Michael better. We can see he doesn't just kill and never talk again. He sort of spirals downward further into the un-talking Michael Myers. It's kind of hard to rework a character in which we don't see his face and he never speaks. How interesting will that be? [Laughs] I think they heaped so much craziness on those sequels trying to keep the franchise alive that the only way to do it was to go, okay, let's just start this over.

I heard you signed on for more sequels. Is that just an internet rumour?

It's an internet rumour. This will be all I'm gonna do.

Are you happy with your contribution to the Halloween universe?

I think it's fucking awesome. This was the big challenge for me. And like you already said, Michael Myers does not seem scary *in the slightest* since, like, 1978. That movie seemed badass when it came out, I loved it, I still love it. But over the years, he's become like Mickey Mouse or something. He's just this thing that you see and it's not scary and people love him like Freddy, but he's just not scary anymore. And the new version of him is pretty intense.

He's much bigger physically, more like Kane Hodder.

He makes Kane Hodder look like a midget! Tyler [Mane]'s, like, 6'11". He's huge. The funny thing is, the kid I cast as young Michael Myers is huge. He's only ten-years-old but he's like this big kid. It totally seemed like that's what that kid would grow up to be. To me I liked it, not because I wanted it to be this giant raging Hulk guy. You know, people say, "What's scary is that he's a normal-sized guy!" Since when is a normal-sized guy scary? Why is that scary? That's not scary to me. [Tyler's] not really that bulky. He's actually kind of tall and thin but it just makes the things he's doing *real*. That's what I thought would make him scary again. That he's big enough that, yeah, he could grab you and lift you off your feet and kill you. But not if you're the same size as him. I didn't want him to be doing sort of supernatural tricks. He seems extra big because the girls are so small.

Truthfully, has making this movie been tough for you?

This has been a crazy one. ... At first there were a ton of people that I met or even people I know who were very anti me making this, then they start seeing footage and they're like, "Fuck, dude, that looks fucking badass!" So they've been getting won over. I look at them and think, "*were you* happy with *Halloween: Resurrection*? Like, did that make your day? You want more of that, with a stunt guy walking around in a cheapo mask that they bought at the drug store?"

Not really.

Yeah, me neither!



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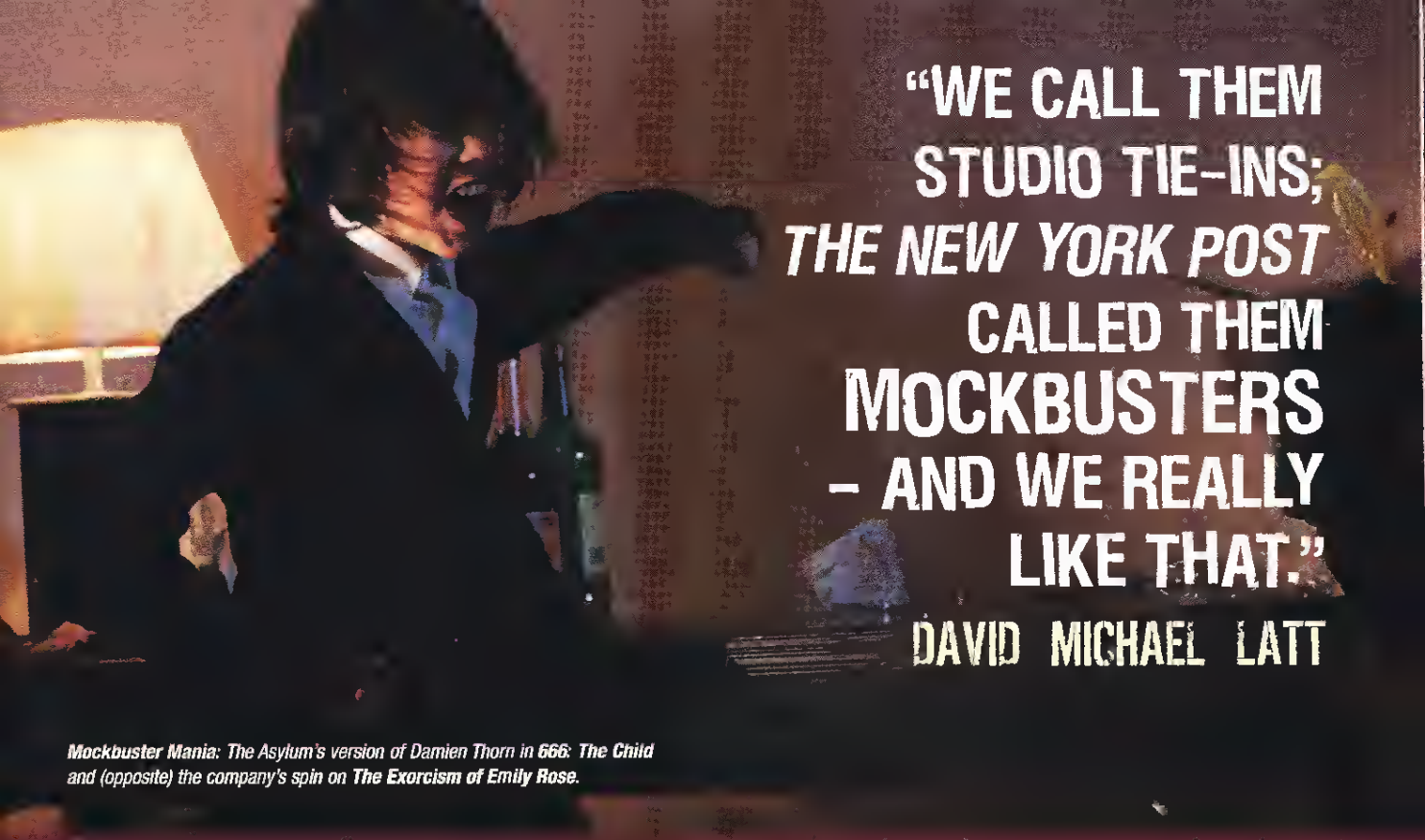


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RE-IMAGININGS OR OUTRIGHT RIP-OFFS? DAVID MICHAEL LATT, PRESIDENT OF THE ASYLUM HOME ENTERTAINMENT – WHICH HAS RELEASED SUCH "MOCKBUSTERS" AS *HALLOWEEN NIGHT*, *WHEN A KILLER CALLS* AND *SNAKES ON A TRAIN* – DESCRIBES HIS COMPANY'S ROLE AS AN OUTRAGEOUS CINEMATIC OPPORTUNIST.

THE COPYCAT KILLERS

BY LAST CHANCE LANCE



"WE CALL THEM STUDIO TIE-INS; *THE NEW YORK POST* CALLED THEM MOCKBUSTERS – AND WE REALLY LIKE THAT."

DAVID MICHAEL LATT

***Mockbuster Mania:** The Asylum's version of Damien Thorn in **666: The Child** and (opposite) the company's spin on **The Exorcism of Emily Rose**.*

For horror fans, browsing through a video store is a balance of desire and desperation. You're either dying to see something in particular, or just dying to see something. A quick look through the genre titles may find you selecting a movie with artwork and a name strangely similar to a major studio film. But closer examination will reveal that you've probably picked out a movie made by The Asylum, and you'll either roll your eyes and throw it back on the shelf or hurry to the checkout counter to satisfy your morbid curiosity.

Founded in 1997 by David Michael Latt with partners David Rimawi and Sherri Strain, The Asylum was set up as an independent film studio that would produce, acquire and distribute movies around the world. Located in the heart of Hollywood, the company started off producing art house films and cutting trailers, but soon developed a reputation for being able to quickly generate low-budget, direct-to-video movies. Utilizing a 5000-square-foot production facility, The Asylum operates with only a handful of full-time employees and a rotating production crew of 30 to 50 people. Currently, the company is able to produce a movie every three to five weeks.

"We do everything," boasts Asylum president David Michael Latt. "We release the film, we have a couple of video labels, we have international partners, we are a self-contained universe.... The only difference between us and Universal is we don't have the rides and attractions."

After a slow start with a handful of films that ranged from political thrillers to "chick flicks" and comedies, the company hit its stride in 2003, impressing B-movie fans with such original outings as *The Monster Hunter*, starring David Carradine as an FBI agent who hunts down serial killers, and *Leeches!*, a campy, trashy, retro throwback featuring nubile teenagers getting their plasma sucked by swollen, sock-puppet parasites.

These new horror productions generated a lot of attention among B-film fans and signalled a dramatic turnaround in company policy. In 2004, all but one of the eighteen films the company released were horror, thriller or sci-fi/horror – from the Stuart Gordon-helmed *King of the Ants* to the much less impressive schlock-fest *Vampires vs. Zombies*. With growing video sales, the following year saw every one of The Asylum's projects dedicated to horror.

"We love the genre," Latt explains, "so it's not like this is [a] painful [move] to make, but it's really dictated by our buyers – not the renter, not the consumer. It's Blockbuster, television, Sci-Fi Channel. If they want a particular genre – in the case of the last few years it's been horror – then we're gonna make horror. It's not really good news for the horror fans out there as we sound a little whoreish in our approach, but you're talking to people who love to make movies."

It was a short leap from there to the even more profitable copycat titles – low, low budget movies incredibly similar to the major studio releases simultaneously premiering on the big screen. It all started with The Asylum's production of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, which hit video store shelves the day before Steven Spielberg's film invaded theatres. This was followed up a few months later by *King of the Lost World* – which was a modern retelling of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic *The Lost World* but had its emphasis placed squarely on a huge ape, and was available as a rental the day before the theatrical premiere of Peter Jackson's blockbuster *King Kong*.

"It didn't start off to be that way," Latt explains about the not-so-subtle coincidences. "But with the success of *War of the Worlds*, it just couldn't be denied that that was a model that was attractive. Our buyers wanted that film because of the association with Spielberg, so we were able to make it and it did very, very well for us, and then we moved on to other titles with a similar connection to the studios. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. It's really not a slam dunk like people might think it is."

Slam dunk or not, by 2006 there had been an obvious decision made by The Asylum to place their creative emphasis on movies that were tie-ins to upcoming theatrical features. The studio hit the rental market hard with a slate of titles with an uncanny resemblance to major genre releases.

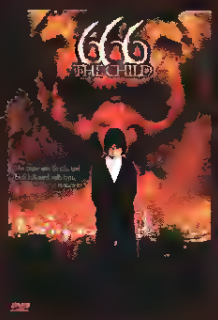
Exorcism: The Possession of Gail Bowers was The Asylum's answer to *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*; *When a Killer Calls* was released just before the remake of the classic *When a Stranger Calls*; *Hillside Cannibals* hit video stores just eighteen days after the remake of *The Hills Have Eyes*; *Pirates of Treasure Island* dropped two weeks before *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's*

LAST RITES COLUMNIST AND BAD MOVIE LOVER LAST CHANCE LANCE SURVEYS SOME OF THE ASYLUM'S RECENT HORROR MOCKBUSTERS.

DELIRIOUS DOPPELGÄNGERS

BY LAST CHANCE LANCE

666: The Child



Releasing a movie about the Antichrist on the sixth day of the sixth month of the sixth year of the new millennium was an ingenious advertising gimmick that the folks at The Asylum just couldn't pass up (too bad the idea had already been thought of by the major studio remaking the original *Omen*). The result was *666: The Child*, a story about a couple that adopts a child who's the only survivor of a plane crash (Flight 7666 – subtle!). Unfortunately for them, new son Damien – er, "Donald" – is a devil-child. In scenes similar to *The Omen*, those who get in his way die horribly, the orphanage he's *from* burns to the ground and the new nanny, Lucy Fir (groan...), is a servant of evil. Despite its faults, *666* is surprisingly entertaining and boasts some decent performances, imaginative gore (grandpa gets shredded by a ceiling fan) and a haunting, first-rate soundtrack.

Exorcism: The Possession of Gail Bowers



When *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* hit theatres in late 2005, The Asylum was right there, quickly cranking out *Exorcism: The Possession of Gail Bowers*, apparently "from the horrifying true story that inspired *The Exorcist*." In this version a rebellious teenager is possessed after playing with a Oulja board, and before you can say "Pazuzu" she's literally crawling the walls, levitating off of her bed and spouting profanities that would make Linda Blair blush. Realizing this is more than teen angst, her family calls in priests to cast the demon out. The movie features Asylum regulars Erica Roby as Gail and Noel Thurman as Gail's sister Anne, plus a standout performance by Thomas Downey as Father Bates, who makes *The Exorcist*'s Father Merrin look like a pussy. Although there's no head-spinning or projectile vomiting, there is a lot of nudity (although not gratuitous) and an eerie soundtrack, making this one of The Asylum's best.

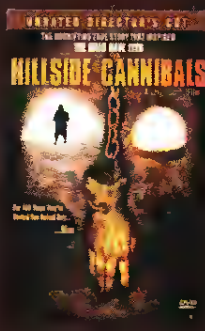
Halloween Night



Stop me if you've heard this one before: a masked maniac escapes from a maximum security medical facility on Halloween night and returns to his hometown intent on killing anyone living in his old house. I guess it was only a matter of time before The Asylum decided to copycat John Carpenter's landmark slasher *Halloween*, and *Halloween Night* is it. Though there isn't a Loomis character to track the killer, there is a group of students having a huge party in the killer's house, providing a lot of nubile young flesh to chop away at. *Halloween Night* is filled with screams, spurting blood and steamy girl-on-girl action, and yet it's continually hampered by piss-poor performances that detract from the story at every turn. Apparently director Mark Atkins was more intent on making lesbian porn than a serious horror movie, delivering a slasher film that doesn't make the cut

Hillside Cannibals

Sometimes you just don't fuck with the classics – and Wes Craven's 1977 original *The Hills Have Eyes* is one of 'em. The 2006 remake may have divided genre fans, but there was one thing they could all agree on: that The Asylum should have stayed off of Craven's coattails. Two weeks after Alexandre Aja's remake hit the big screen, Leigh Scott's *Hillside Cannibals* appeared, featuring a group of teenagers stranded in the desert, where they're attacked by inbred cannibals intent on chopping them up for dinner. These direct descendants of the Scottish Sawney Bean clan mumble





The Hitchhiker and (opposite) *666: The Child.*

and gibber at each other throughout the film in a made-up language that's hilarious for about ten seconds before it becomes completely annoying. Though there are some good gore scenes involving halved corpses and fingers snipped by rusty scissors, the horrible acting and bongo soundtrack will make you want to eat your own face.



The Hitchhiker

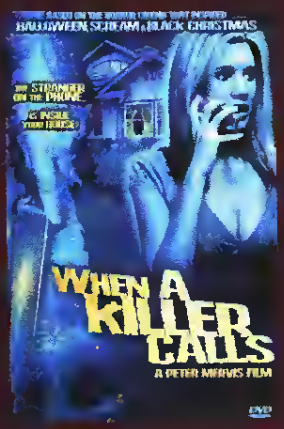
The 1986 classic *The Hitcher* taught us that no matter how pathetic, cold or wet they look, never pick up strangers. In the 2007 remake, Sean Bean took over the role made famous by Rutger Hauer, but never quite recaptured the intensity of the character. Kudos to Asylum regular Jeff Denton, then, who clocks in a fairly solid performance as the title character in *The Hitchhiker*. He plays a serial killer who thumbs his way across the California desert, murdering anyone who gives him a lift. He's picked up by four nubile women, who he drugs, traps in a seedy hotel room, threatens, beats and rapes. Director Leigh Scott makes solid use of limited locations, creating a claustrophobic feeling that permeates the movie. A definite departure from *The Hitcher*, it's a worthwhile watch that examines the story from the point of view of the killer, exploring *his* insecurities instead ot his victims' dilemma.

Snakes On A Train

For the folks at The Asssssylum, this was one property that must have had them sssssalivating. Hell, Bees on a Boat, Scorpions on a Submanne, Frogs on a Ferris Wheel – just fill in the blanks. They went with the less-inspired *Snakes on a Train*, though, which has nothing to do with *Snakes on a Plane* and hit shelves a month prior to the Samuel L. Jackson film. It begins with a Mexican couple hiding aboard an LA-bound train. Some kind of Mayan curse has been placed on the girl, making her barf up a green goo laced with snakes that go on a rampage. The tagline reads "100 trapped passengers – 3000 venomous vipers" but there are only about a dozen passengers and not many more (mostly rubber or CG) snekes. While well paced, the overly serious flick is a waste of time that could've worked better as a parody.

When A Killer Calls

In 1979, the release year for *When a Stranger Calls*, phones weighed 10 lbs. and voicemail was still science fiction. Not surprisingly, in the age of cellphones and *69, Simon West's Hollywood remake of the classic was impotent; however, it was downright horrifying to hear that The Asylum had dialed up their own version as a tie-in. You know the story: a babysitter is harassed by a mysterious caller and, fearing for her safety, rings the police only to discover that the calls are coming from – gasp! – inside the house! It's been done before, but I begrudgingly admire *When a Killer Calls* director Peter Mervis for notching up the horror and gore in his leaner, meaner version by making the killer a truly sadistic fuck who brutally tortures his victims before offing them. The only downside is that the chesty blonde bimbo portraying the sitter in this version phoned in her dull performance.



SLUMMING SOON FROM THE ASYLUM

A quick look at some of the new and upcoming titles from the current kings of the cinematic fake-out.

SUPERCROC

An elite military unit is called in to battle a gigantic 100-foot-long mutated crocodile that threatens the city of Los Angeles

UNIVERSAL SOLDIERS

A group of genetically enhanced super soldiers escape their prison/lab and must be stopped before they destroy mankind

INVASION OF THE POD PEOPLE

Another updated version of 1956's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* where the population of the world is slowly replaced by evil alien doppelgangers hatched from horrific space pods



FREAKSHOW

In this modern retelling of Tod Browning's 1932 cult classic *Freaks*, a group of criminals plan to take over a travelling circus but their plans are thwarted when the circus' sideshow oddities decide to stop them dead in their tracks

30,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

An adaptation of Jules Verne's seminal classic, which tells the story of Captain Nemo and his futuristic submarine The Nautilus as he attempts to stop mankind from warring against each other while battling the mysterious monsters that haunt the ocean's depths.

WAR OF THE WORLDS: THE NEXT WAVE

The Martians are back and this time they aren't going to be stopped by the common cold.

I AM OMEGA

Do we really have to explain this one?

Last Chance Lance





Familiar Frights: *Papa Jupe's kissing cousin and (below) the* ***Re-Animator*** *take-off* ***Night of the Dead.***

Chest, *666: The Child* came out on the very same day the remake of *The Omen* hit American theatres and, most notably, the utterly horrible *Snakes on a Train* was on shelves a full month before the much-hyped *Snakes on a Plane* was released. (For selected reviews, see sidebar.)

With a filmography reading like a criminal rap sheet, it appears that The Asylum was deliberately trying to confuse renters into thinking they were picking up a movie that they had seen advertised or had heard good things about. Or perhaps it's just easier to ride on the marketing campaign of another production company's film and hopefully capitalize on their success.

"It may look like a scummy thing to do," Latt admits. "We're making films that entertain and we hope that it happens. So we write the best scripts we can, we find the best actors that we can, we find the best crew that we can, we find the best locations and hope that combination gives the audience something to have fun with. It's not necessarily proving to be the most effective model but it's something that certainly helps a company that can't afford [ads] or marketing. I don't think people that pick up our *War of the Worlds* are confused that it isn't the Tom Cruise version, but will hopefully enjoy it on its own."

Obviously the term "rip-off" comes up a lot under these circumstances, which is nothing new in the world of genre film. In fact, most of the titles that The Asylum is accused of "ripping-off" are remakes themselves. Latt is quick to point out that the only reason the company has been so successful – with over 100 movies in its production/distribution catalogue – is its ability to adapt to the demands of the market. The Asylum's newfound notoriety has even been the topic of an interview on NBC's *The Today Show*, which saw Latt defending the company's production record against a consumer advocate group and confused video renters. (The company also has a habit of printing positive statements about their films on their DVD covers, which are designed to look like reviewer quotes but aren't attributed to anyone.)

"I don't care," he says of the backlash. "I'm having the time of my life making some really great films, in my opinion. Internally we call them 'studio tie-ins,' *The New York Post* called them 'mockbusters' – and we really like that. Again, it's giving us this great access to many genres that we would otherwise not be able to do. I get it from a business standpoint, but from a creative standpoint it can be frustrating. I think a lot of films get passed over and shortchanged by the audience because they don't respect the fact that each film, even if it is a mock-buster, is still its own movie and deserves to be treated as such."

Looking at The Asylum's shot-on-digital output, it's obvious they've developed a formula. With production costs ranging from between $200,000 – $500,000 for their smaller productions and closer to $1 million for a larger movie, they tend to shy away from hiring big-name stars, relying instead on casting virtually unknown talent or seeking out familiar (and cheaper) B-movie actors and genre fan favourites like C. Thomas Howell, Bruce Boxleitner and Lance Henriksen.

"The star question for us has been negligible," explains Latt. "Honestly, we don't pay people studio rates. We pay them a lot less and so we have a lot of beginners. We haven't seen any kind of increase of sale when we put a star into the movie, but that being said, now that we have this library it's kind of, like, maybe now we need to have it because that makes it sexy, because having a star like C. Thomas Howell makes it sexier than someone you've never heard of."

With their quick shooting schedules and very low budgets, it's a wonder that actors and crews keep returning to The Asylum for work, but Latt has an answer for that too. "We have a lot of repeat business with a lot of people; we're not too corporate so it's not all about business. We're the guys who love to make movies and that attracts people to the company and, money aside, they get the credit and they get to be involved with some really cool movies that actually get put out into the marketplace."

Latt, who is always in charge of production and has even directed a number of films himself, including *War of the Worlds* and *Scarecrow Slayer*, frequently has his returning writers and directors – who include Leigh Scott (*Hillside Cannibals*, *Pirates of Treasure Island*), Paul Bales (*Legion of the Dead*) and Peter Mervis (*When a Killer Calls*, *The Da Vinci Treasure*) – eschew drama in favour of horror scenes, as often as possible.

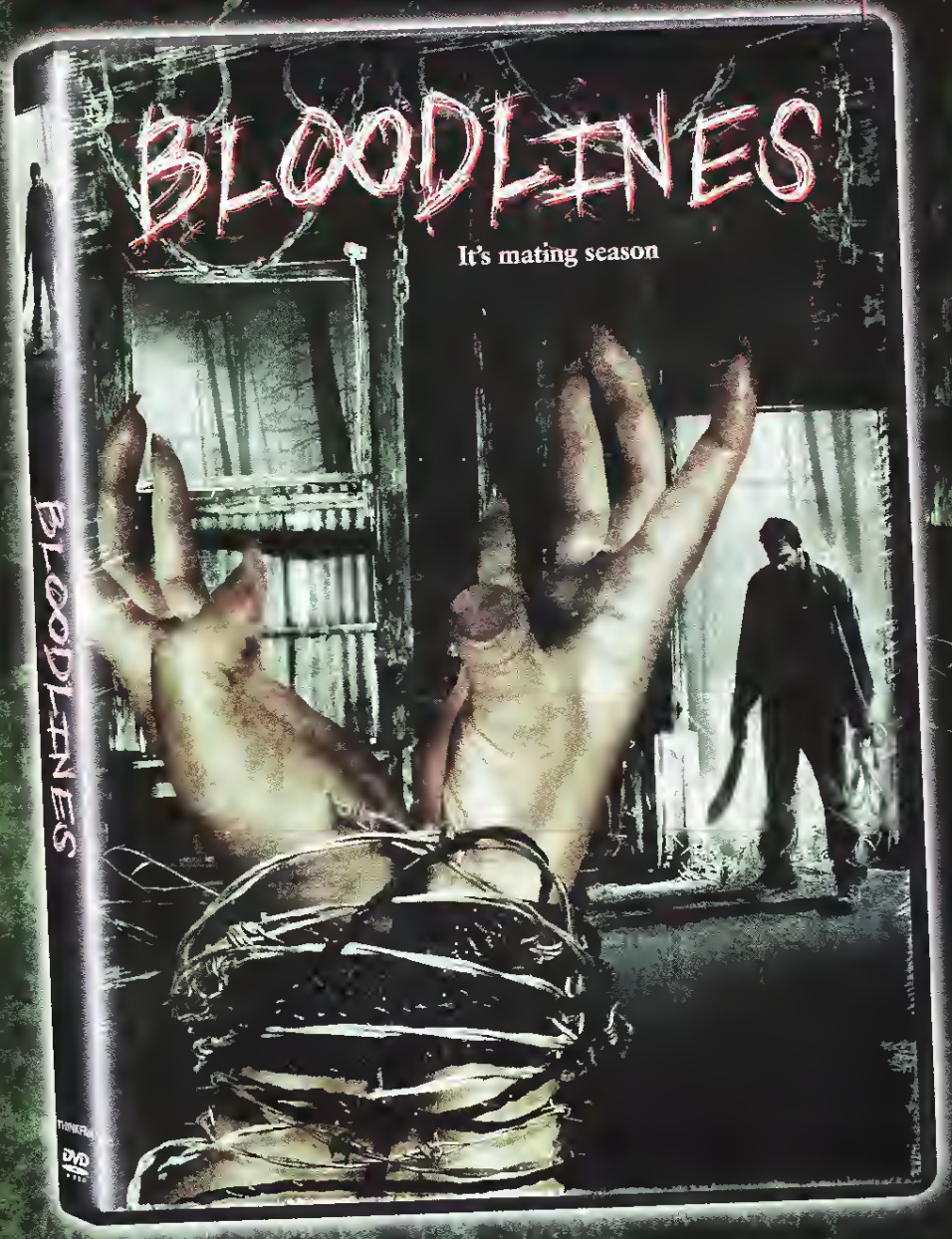
"There really is nowhere else in Hollywood that works at our pace," Scott maintains. "It's great, everyone is always working. Otherwise you wait around for months and months for something to come along. Plus, these guys are my friends and we have a lot of fun."

The official Asylum website (theasylum.cc) not only offers their vast horror library of DVDs for sale, it also has an extensive fan forum that encourages feedback and even invites aspiring actors and writers to submit their resumes and scripts for consideration – something almost unheard of in the filmmaking business.

"The response has been great," Latt says enthusiastically. "I love keeping the doors open but I hate dealing with agents and managers. I try to keep it pretty straight in my approach and it's paid off very well in that I don't have to deal with the bullshit."



SCREAM. FIGHT. BREED.



College bound, Amber Strickland finds herself stranded after her jeep breaks down on a desolate highway deep in the Southern backwoods. Brutally abducted, she awakens alongside other women, imprisoned by a demented inbred family. Her nightmare quickly worsens when she is forced to face the other victims in a fight to the death. What she doesn't know is that the survivors have the grimmest fate of all... to carry on the family BLOODLINE!!!

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LES EDWARDS has been illustrating the genre for over 35 years, amassing an impressive assortment of book covers and movie posters.

THROUGH THE EYES OF LES EDWARDS

BY PAUL KANE



Edwards' UK poster for Clive Barker's ***Nightbreed****, his cover for Mick Garris' novel* ***Development Hell*** *and (opposite) the original art for Barker's* ***Son of Celluloid*** *graphic novel.*

In genre circles, English artist Les Edwards is a man who needs very little introduction. His award-winning oil paintings, which have an almost photographic quality to them, have graced the covers of books, games and movie posters for more than 35 years – with the prints and originals now collector's items in their own right. From Clive Barker to John Carpenter to Stephen King, top horror authors and publishers recognize that Edwards is the go-to man when it comes to capturing the essence of a particular chilling work in a single image.

"I was always interested in anything strange or bizarre, whatever form it took," Edwards tells *Rue Morgue*. "It's hard to believe now, but when I was young, fantasy and horror were hard to come by, so you really had to search it out, and that might have been part of the attraction."

Edwards studied at Hornsey College of Art in the UK from 1968 to 1972, where, incredibly, he was told he would never make a living from illustration because it was too difficult. Proving the naysayers wrong, he was recruited by the Young Artists Agency and throughout the '70s produced covers for sci-fi, fantasy and horror publications such as *The Star Book of Horror* (1976), which featured stories by Robert Bloch and Ramsey Campbell. Through his agent he also began to secure work for advertising campaigns and provided poster art for movies such as *The Thing* (1982) and the gorgeous UK print for Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* (1990).

"Film posters were often painted then, so it wasn't terribly unusual. Now, of course, you almost never see a painted poster, which is a shame."

Edwards was already a Clive Barker fan when he took on the job of coming up with concepts for the author's work. "I'd read the *Books of Blood* and *The Damnation Game* and I was a big fan. Then *Hellraiser* blew me away."

Edwards continued to work with Barker after the









author suggested he was the right person to illustrate the graphic novel *Son of Celluloid* for Eclipse. Edwards explains, "I'd never done a comic strip before but everyone was pleased with the result, and so *Rawhead Rex* was the next logical step. And I was in the middle of painting *Son of Celluloid* when Clive steered *Nightbreed* my way. He knew I would love doing the poster so he suggested me for the job."

Edwards has an unparalleled body of work to his name (for which he's won seven British Fantasy Awards), from the covers of *Christopher Lee's New Chamber of Horrors* (1978) and Brian Lumley's *The Second Wish and Other Exhalations* (1994), right through to *The Mammoth Book of Vampire Stories by Women* (2000) and recently Mick Garris' *Development Hell* (*RM#65*) for Cemetery Dance. But his method of putting together cover images has changed over the years.

"Ideally, I like to read the story and try to get an idea that way," he explains. "Unfortunately, that's increasingly uncommon with large publishers as they tend to have a very precise idea of what they want on a cover. It's decided in committee and I usually just get a rather narrow brief. They most definitely have the final say. The author might be consulted. Independent publishers like PS [for which he recently provided the cover of King's *Colorado Kid*] are much more open to accepting my interpretation, which is one of the reasons I'm so pleased to be working more in this area."

Although Edwards has always produced a wide range of work, he became more well known for painting horror, something he was very pleased with. Sadly, when the genre went into decline in the 1990s, he found it increasingly difficult to get work because publishers saw him as "the guy that does horror," thus, the pseudonym Edward Miller was born.

"My agents and I cooked up Edward Miller as a way of bypassing this problem," the artist reveals. "The idea was that Ed's work would be quite different and there would be no 'Les Edwards baggage.' I was quite skeptical but people seemed to take to the new acrylic stuff straight away. Then, when I left my agent, we had to come clean to clients and Ed's secret was revealed to an astonished world."

Whether credited to Edwards or Miller, the artist's output has remained undeniably creepy and lifelike. People often get a chill from simply looking at his work.

"It's very pleasing, of course, when people tell me that, and I'm genuinely flattered. Unfortunately, I do have the very English habit of disparaging myself, which other nationalities don't necessarily appreciate. Like a lot of English people I find praise a bit embarrassing, but that doesn't mean I want it to stop."

To view more of Edwards' paintings visit lesedwards.com and edwardmiller.co.uk

The Art of Horror: *The book cover for* ***Christopher Lee's New Chamber of Horrors*** *and an interior from Barker's* ***Rawhead Rex,*** *adapted by Steve Niles.*

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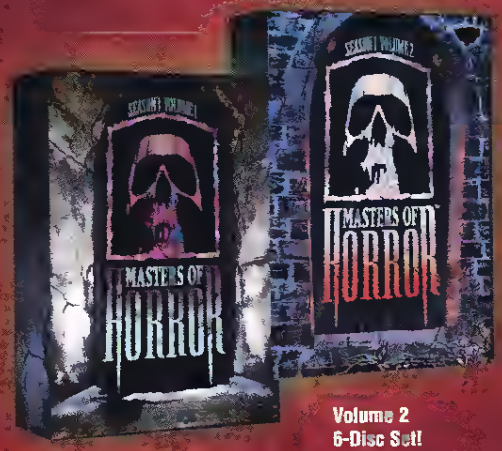
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RECLUSIVE SCRIBE **BENTLEY LITTLE** WEAVES BITING SOCIAL COMMENTARY WITH TRADITIONAL HORROR

The Horrors of Everyday Life

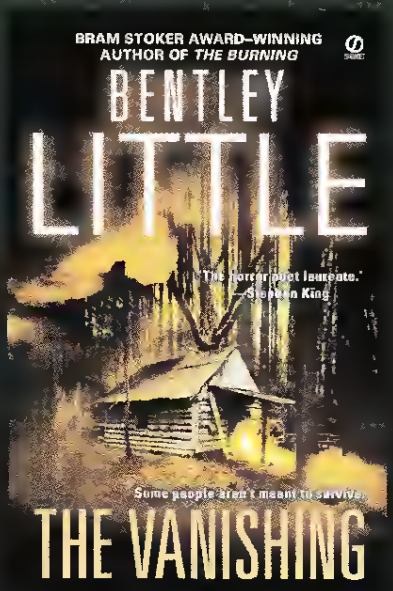
BY W. BRICE MCVICAR

Inhabited by vampires, sadistic mailmen, big-box stores containing unspeakable evil and towering monsters seeking fornication with humans, the fictional universes created by best-selling author Bentley Little present a twisted, satirical view of the world his readers live in.

For nearly twenty years the reclusive Fullerton, California-based author has been penning tales that are as terrifying as they are topical. With seventeen published books and multiple Bram Stoker nominations, Little's ability to take current social concerns, such as man's often devastating impact on the environment, and give them his own bizarre, ironic renderings has allowed him to create a unique niche in the genre – one where the things that go bump in the night may be supernatural but, more often than not, have been borne from the depths of our reality and the mundanities of everyday life.

"It's fun," Little tells *Rue Morgue*, when asked why current events are often a launching pad for his work. "It's also probably a lingering influence from my grad school days, this need to have my work be about something. Horror is also a very conservative genre in many respects. I suppose I feel the need to balance that and get my liberal viewpoint in front of readers."

This political slant is on display again in his latest novel, *The Vanishing* (available August 7 from Signet), a tale of how greed during the booming gold rush in 1800s California had a (literally) monstrous effect on some of America's richest families. In other words, it's not just a horror story but also a modern parable about the way we treat the environment.



Little successfully exploits another of his oft-used techniques in *The Vanishing* as well, wherein he examines the past and its influence on the present. A number of his novels, including *The Walking* (2000), use a similar device, which sees plots and subplots unfold at different times in the book. For instance, one part of a tale may be told in the present, while another gazes into the past, providing greater insight to the story.

In *The Vanishing*, a Los Angeles reporter tries to unravel the mystery surrounding a number of grisly murders involving high profile and highly successful businessmen. As Little leads the reader through the present-day, he also shows how one man in the mid-1800s is moving towards a destiny, which creates the impetus for the modern homicides.

"I think it's important for people to remember that actions have consequences, that there's a ripple effect to everything that occurs," says Little. "Besides, horror is all about the past; if it was about the future it would be science fiction. Whether it's vampires, ghosts, curses or what have you, the majority of horror fiction concerns itself with the effect of the past on the present. I also happen to think that the past is spooky. Old houses? Old burial grounds? Ruins? They all scare the crap out of me."

A statement made more intriguing when one considers an anecdote which often appears in the "about the author" blurb in Little's novels. It reads that Little was "born in Arizona shortly after his mother attended the world premiere of *Psycho*." As legend goes, Little's parents knew nothing about the film and were anticipating something more along the lines of *North by Northwest*.

"My grandma still says, in hushed tones with a totally serious face, 'Your mother screamed so much [during the movie] we thought you would be retarded,'" admits Little. "Instead, I became a horror author." Obsessed with the genre since catching a brief glimpse of Vincent Price in *The Haunted Palace* at age three, by grammar school, Little spent much his free time writing tales of monsters, ghosts and haunted houses. Before he'd finished his English degree at California State University, he'd made his first professional sale to the now-defunct magazine *The Horror Show*, and within a week had sold a second tale. For his thesis, he wrote a horror novel – a risky endeavour since he didn't know if his professors would even accept it.

"I was really sweating it out because all of the other MA candidates were writing coming-of-age stories rife with literary allusions and here I was writing a story about killer fetuses in a redneck town."

Not only was the novel, which he titled *The Revelation*, accepted by his professors, it also launched his career. Signet picked up the book and released it as a mass-market paperback. The novel went on to win a Bram Stoker Award for Best First Novel in 1990, making Little one of the early recipients of the then-relatively new award and one of the first to proudly bear "Bram Stoker Award Winner" on the cover of his books. Getting those words there, however, proved more difficult than one might expect, with Signet initially refusing and claiming that the award meant nothing.



"WHETHER IT'S VAMPIRES, GHOSTS, CURSES OR WHAT HAVE YOU, THE MAJORITY OF HORROR FICTION CONCERNS ITSELF WITH THE EFFECT OF THE PAST ON THE PRESENT."

Bentley Little

Signet initially refusing and claiming that the award meant nothing.

"I argued that general readers knew nothing about the Hugo or Nebula awards either and were familiar with them only because their names were plastered over the cover of books," explains Little, of the first of several disputes that would eventually see him part ways with Signet. "I insisted that my publisher do the same with the Bram Stoker Award. Even if no one knew what it was, I said, it sounded impressive."

His 1991 follow-up *The Mailman* sold so poorly when it was first published he was told he had to use a pen name for his third book (*Death Instinct*, 1992) and was additionally instructed that the new novel was not to be horror. Despite his apprehension, Little did as told and the book came and went with sales as low as his previous outing.

Signet had first refusal rights on his next offering so, throwing fuel on the proverbial fire, Little wrote *The Summoning*, a tale of a Chinese vampire which terrorizes the residents of Rio Grande, Arizona, including Sue Wing, whose grandmother sheds light on how the beast kills and how to kill it.

"My editor told me that horror was dead and suggested I write a police procedural since that was the coming thing," Little explains. "So, I intentionally wrote *The Summoning*. I was hoping they would refuse the novel and they did. I escaped. But horror really was dead in the marketplace at that point and I ended up selling the novel to Zebra for an embarrassingly small advance because no one else wanted it. I figured my career was pretty much dead. But then the president of Signet read *The Summoning*, [he] liked it and asked why I wasn't still with the company. My editor was fired, I was offered real money and I've been with Signet ever since."

So too has the pseudonym Little used for *Death Instinct*. While "Phillip Emmons" hasn't published a book in years, Little has written him into most of his stories since. Keen-eyed readers, Little says, should be able to figure out Emmons' story by putting together the bits and pieces which appear throughout his body of work. It is also not uncommon to come across other recurring characters and places in Little's writing. This is his way, he explains, of rewarding his "hardcore fans."

His return to Signet with 1995's *University* set the stage for Little to begin creating some of his most recognized work. Before long the author was churning out at least one novel every year. Two of his most famous books *The Store* (1996) and *The Ignored* (1997) – about one man's descent into obscurity, which leads to his literal disappearance from society – were released during this prolific period. This was also when Little's work began to stray from supernatural fare to the author's trademark dredging of the wells of day-to-day life for story ideas. An additional benefit to this new approach to horror was that he could now publicly criticize those individuals and groups whose actions he sees as questionable.

Little confesses that many of his ideas come from things that piss him off. For instance, problems with his insurance company prompted the writing of *The Policy* (2003) and a dispute between Little and his homeowners' association gave him the springboard for *The Association* (2001). *The Store*, in which a major chain store comes to a small town and not only drives smaller, independent retailers out of business but also brings with it death and prices not paid in monetary funds, came after a large chain store rubbed him the wrong way, he says.



His ability to draw these tales' necessarily complex, true-to-life characters can be attributed to a past filled with a variety of odd jobs. Among the occupations Little has held – and continues to mine inspiration from – are reporter, technical writer, sales clerk, rodeo gatekeeper, video arcade attendant and library assistant. It was his time in the newspaper industry, however, which best prepared him for his career as an author.

"I have to say that working as a reporter was the best training for me as a novelist," Little says. "Not only was I exposed to a wide cross-section of society but I was required to write under deadline pressure and produce something every day. All fiction writers should be forced to apprentice at newspapers."

No less opinionated now than early in his career, Little refuses to budge on issues or insult his readers by watering down his books.

"I've kept my focus on writing what I want, on doing the best work I can on subjects of my own choosing, and I have not had to dilute my energies or insult my audience by penning inferior novelizations of television shows. The fact that I'm still here doing very well while many of my contemporaries have fallen by the wayside tells me that I made the right choice in this regard."

Additionally, there are no taboo subjects for him and he believes if authors begin policing their thoughts and what they present to readers, then society is truly in trouble.

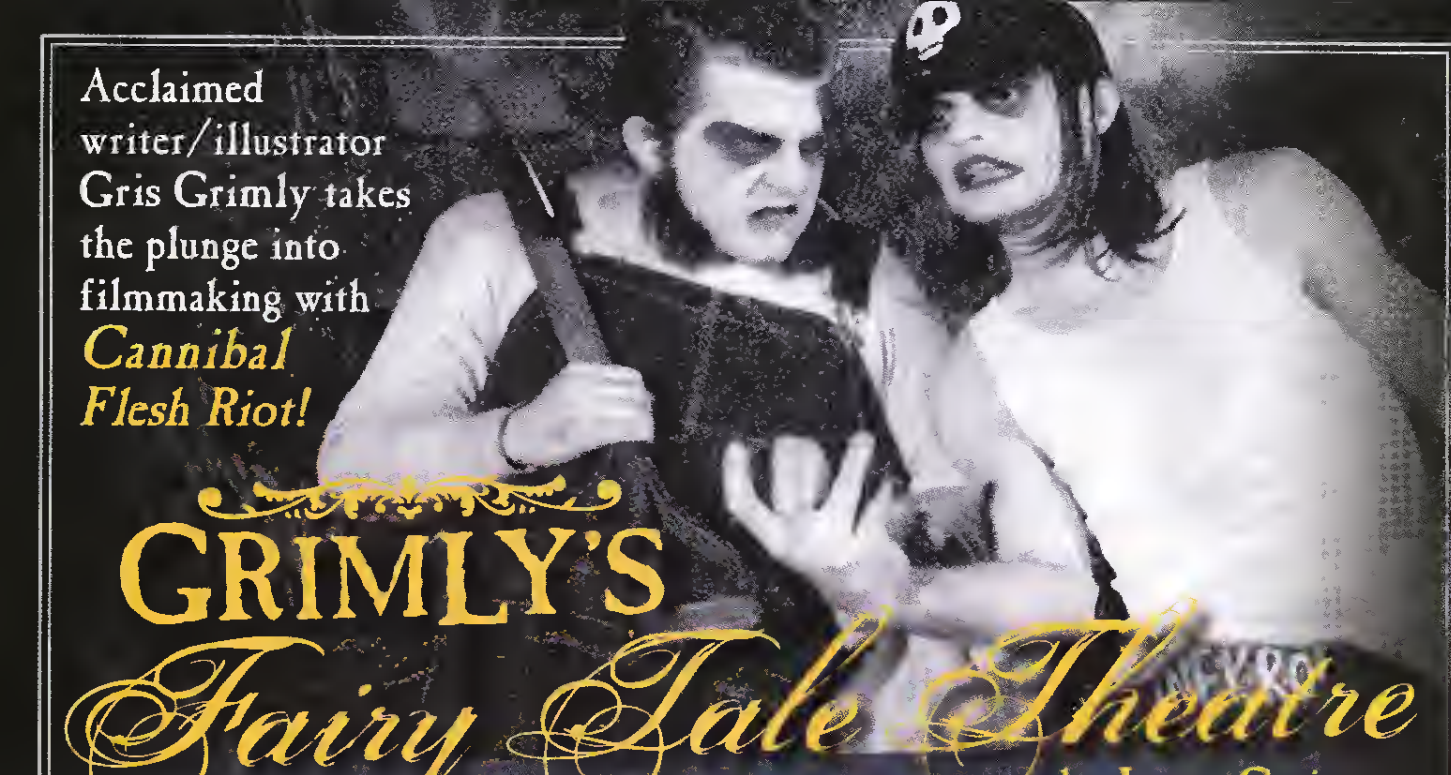
Unlike most contemporary horror authors, Little rarely gives interviews to the media, does not participate in conventions and doesn't operate a website.

"I'm a writer not a media personality," he explains. "I do communicate with my readers through my novels. But this idea that I'm not supposed to just write books, I'm supposed to befriend the people who read those books is an idiotic one to me."

Last year Little ventured into altogether new territory when his short story "The Washingtonians," concerning cannibals in Washington and how America's first president may not have been exactly what he seemed, was adapted for a second season episode of *Masters of Horror* by Peter Medak (*The Changeling*). Although disappointed in the ending, Little says he thought the result was a decent representation of his original piece. More of Little's work may soon be making the leap from page to film as both *The Ignored* and *The Store* have been optioned.

"How do I feel about that?" says Little, "I'm fine with it. Obviously, I would love to see a really good movie made from one of my novels but even having a bad movie made is still kind of exciting. Besides, as many authors before me have pointed out, no matter what happens with screen adaptations, the original books are still there."

Acclaimed writer/illustrator Gris Grimly takes the plunge into filmmaking with *Cannibal Flesh Riot!*



GRIMLY'S *Fairy Tale Theatre*

by James Grainger

You don't have to be a professor of film studies to understand that cinema is primarily a visual medium – a fact that goes a long way to explaining why so many of the most innovative minds in the genre got their start working in other visual art fields. Tim Burton cut his teeth painting animation cels for Disney, Guillermo del Toro apprenticed under makeup master Dick Smith and Stanley Kubrick's first day job was as a photographer for *Look* magazine, so it isn't a stretch to predict that the release of *Cannibal Flesh Riot!*, the first short film by Gris Grimly (*RM#35*) – best known for his playful, creepy illustrated children's books – may signal a career change for the artist.

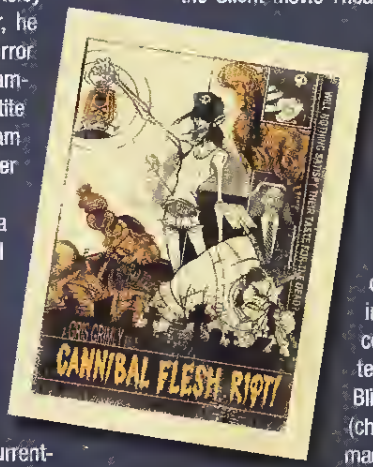
The comedic story of two cannibalistic hayseeds whose grave-robbing exploits invoke the wrath of a Lovecraftian beast, *Cannibal Flesh Riot!* brings to the screen the same postmodern blend of gothic morbidity, comic-book storyboarding and B-movie hysteria that made Grimly books such as *Santa Claws*, *Monster Museum* and *Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Mystery and Madness* hits with both young readers and aging goths. Grimly says the transition from artist to filmmaker was a natural one.

"I don't write and illustrate dark children's books because I want to work on children's books, but because I want to tell dark stories," he explains. "I approach a project with the idea that in the end it would be something I would want to own. Making a film is just another approach to telling a story."

Although he credits the influence of such artists as Charles Addams, Edward Gorey and EC Comics' Ghastly Grimes as pivotal to his visual style, some of the most formative groundwork was laid via TV reruns of old horror films.

"My earliest horror movie memory was seeing *The Fly* with Vincent Price," he recalls. "I remember the ending in that movie really left a mark on my mind. I also remember seeing *Horror Express* with Peter Cushing and thinking how satanic it was. Movies are so much more impressionable on you as a child."

Grimly was hooked, and in between sessions of copying comic strips by Berkeley Breathed from the newspaper, he began shooting his own horror films on his cousin's VHS camcorder while indulging his appetite for the monster operas of William Castle, James Whale and Roger Corman.



Described by Grimly as "a black comedy inspired by all those old black and white campy monster flicks," *Cannibal Flesh Riot!* started out as a non-cinematic collaboration between the artist and his friend Peter Sandorff (former guitarist for the Nekromantix, currently playing with Mad Sin). Sandorff approached Grimly in 2003 to write and illustrate a horror comic that he would compose the music for.

Grimly came up with a story about two grave-robbing ghouls, and after starting work on the twelve-page comic, decided to adapt the idea into a film. He gathered friends to help out with the production, including California artists D.W. Frydendall and Evil Paul. Sandorff agreed to compose the music and formed the band Hola Ghost to accomplish the task.

"The film was shot in seven nights in the spring of 2005," Grimly reveals, "but because everyone was working on their free time, post-production took over a year." Besides writing and directing *Cannibal Flesh Riot!*, Grimly also designed and helped build puppets for a few extended stop-motion scenes.

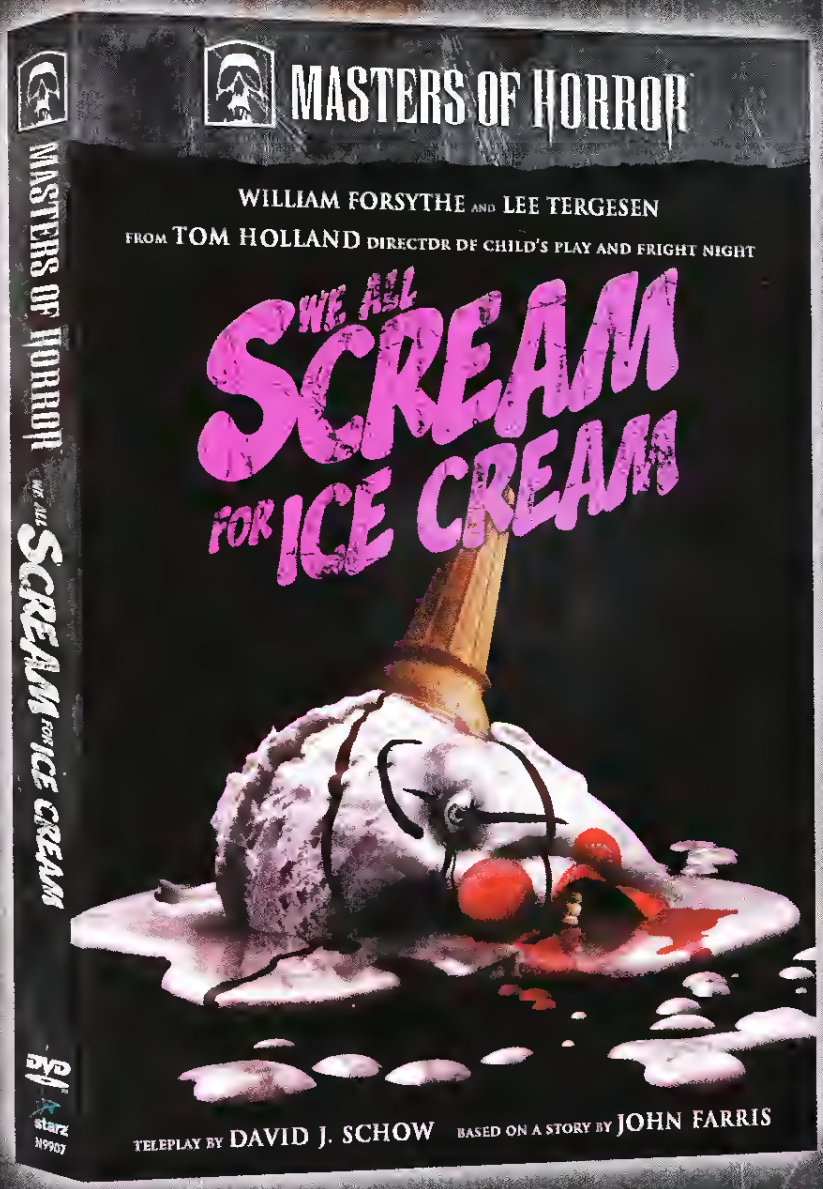
The finished product premiered this spring at the Silent Movie Theatre in Hollywood and has started doing the rounds at horror conventions and film festivals. Grimly plans to release the film this summer as a limited-edition DVD package that includes a disc with 50 minutes of special features and a CD compilation of songs inspired by the film, with contributions from seventeen bands, including Blitzkid and Psycho Charger (check Grimly's website, madcreator.com for details.)

In the meantime, Grimly is fleshing out on a number of new cinematic concepts.

"I have two more short ideas that I'm looking to produce next year," he says. "I also have ideas for a number of feature films. But for now, I would like to get them produced in-house rather than pitching them to studios."

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DIRECTED BY

TOM HOLLAND (CHILD'S PLAY, FRIGHT NIGHT)

STARRING

WILLIAM FORSYTHE (THE DEVIL'S REJECTS)

LEE TERGESEN (THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: THE BEGINNING)

William Forsythe stars as Buster The Clown, a mentally challenged man who sells ice cream from his Cheery Tyme truck until a cruel prank by a bunch of neighborhood boys goes horrifically wrong. A generation later they're all grown men with families, but the crime of their past may now be trolling for their children. Buster and his truck have returned for sweet revenge, and every frozen treat will bring its own taste of Hell.

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ANCHOR BAY



Whitney (Bijou Phillips) is left to others' devices in Eli Roth's gory ***Hostel: Part II.***

TORTUROUS INDEED

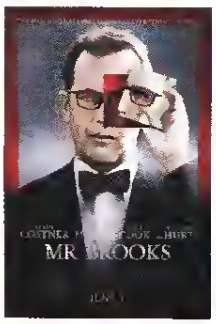
HOSTEL: PART II

Starring Lauren German, Bijou Phillips and Heather Matarazzo
Written and directed by Eli Roth
Maple

With barely a handful of films to his credit, Eli Roth has made a big, bloody mark on the face of horror. He's the bad boy director who likes gross-out gore just as much as juvenile humour and he's equally at home in the pages of *Maxim* as he is in *Rue Morgue*. Curious then that *Hostel: Part II*, the follow-up to his box-office success "torture porn" gorefest, features a group of females who are captured and mutilated in the infamous Slovakian dungeon. It makes one wonder: does Roth push the boundaries of acceptability too far? Is it more hype than hardcore horror?

Sadly, the hype wins. Oh sure, there's some truly horrific stuff in the film, from a literal blood bath to a penis-snipping scene that will have male viewers clutching their crotches, but what happens in the 60-odd minutes leading up to the carnage amounts to little more than meaningless exposition that never establishes the characters as anything more than meat for the machine. That might have been Roth's intent, but the payoff is not so effective when there is no real setup.

Aside from the gender flip, *Hostel II*'s plot doesn't stray much from the first installment. Now it's the girls' turn to be splayed and filleted. A wealthy heiress (Lauren German), a bitchy slut (Bijou Phillips) and a dorky mama's girl (Heather Matarazzo) vacation in Europe, where they meet a gorgeous babe who lures them to a spa (cue ominous music). Meanwhile, we're introduced to the two white-collar American men who successfully bid on the right to be the girls' torturers.



The film certainly had possibilities. The businessmen could have served as commentary on modern man's need for violence, but like *Hostel*, this film resists anything remotely serious in favour of just being as gross as possible. Roth places so much emphasis on the bloody set pieces that it's not so much a gore film, as a film *about* gore. The irony of course is that *Hostel: Part II* does just the opposite of shocking the audience – it bores them with a predictable kill-a-thon. If Roth really wants to get our attention, he could try making a movie that has something more interesting than a death scene.

Now that would be shocking.

Aaron Von Lupton

PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL COSTNER

MR. BROOKS

Starring Kevin Costner, Demi Moore and Dane Cook
Directed by Bruce A. Evans
Written by Bruce A. Evans and Raynold Gideon
MGM

Mr. Brooks arrived in theatres and then promptly disappeared like... a stalker in the night. That's too bad, because despite its overplotting and lack of clarity, it's one of the most unique takes on the serial killer genre in recent memory and makes for a massively interesting character study bolstered by brilliant performances courtesy of William Hurt and – don't laugh – Kevin Costner.

As the anti-hero of the film's title, Costner's Brooks is a successful, wealthy, loving husband and father. Yet, he also suffers from a secret addiction to murder – a disease in which he is egged on by his darker alter ego, played here by a sardonic Hurt. After being awarded Man of the Year from the Portland Chamber of Commerce, Brooks relapses and kills a couple of lovebirds, his first victims in two years. Unfortunately (for him), he's photographed by a peeping Tom who coerces Brooks into taking him on as a serial killer apprentice in order to experience the thrill of murder first-hand. Meanwhile, the killing reignites an investigation by a female detective (a sadly

uninspired Demi Moore) who has been on Brooks' trail for years without success. There's actually another killer on *her* trail, though, and if that sounds like a lot of plot, well, it doesn't end there – even at a 120 minutes, the film barely supports its own weight.

There's a lot going on in *Mr. Brooks*, and the movie's message is not straightforward. Are we supposed to believe that murder can actually be an addiction? Or is murder presented here as an analogy to show how an addiction can lead good people to do bad things? Or is the film simply a Jekyll and Hyde look at the duality of good and evil? The movie's quirky tone takes away from any serious commentary on serial killing.

While it frustrates those looking for a clear narrative thrust, the questions and possible answers in *Mr. Brooks* makes it one of the most thought-provoking thrillers in some time. And whatever the film is about, Costner's twisted yet introspective character makes for a truly memorable bad guy. Maybe now we can finally forgive him for *Waterworld*.

Aaron Von Lupton

PROTEIN DEFICIENT

MEATBALL MACHINE

Starring Issei Takahashi, Aoba Kawai and Kenichi Kawasaki
Directed by Jun'ichi Yamamoto and Yudai Yamaguchi
Written by Junya Kato
TLA Releasing

Note to filmmakers: if you're going to rip off – sorry, be inspired by – another movie, pick a good one. *Meatball Machine* is a gooey riff on Shinya Tsukamoto's weirdly original *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* that mistakes cliché romantic misadventure for tragedy and inventive special effects for entertainment. The result is admittedly gruetastic but hopelessly silly.

Issei Takahashi stars as Yoji, a shy young machinist in love with Sachiko (Aoba Kawai), the equally shy young factory girl he ogles during his lunch breaks. After getting beaten up by a transvestite(!?), Yoji discovers a biomechanical *thing* in the alley and takes it with him. Bad move: when Sachiko walks him home one night, the parasite attacks and rapes her, taking over her body, turning her into a shambling, deadly cyborg.

The reasonably distraught Yoji is then taken in by a father and daughter team who explain that Sachiko has been invaded by an unearthly parasite that turns its human host into a living weapons factory. The hosts, now turned into awkward-looking "necroborgs," battle each other to the death, feasting on the defeated parasite. A betrayal leads to Yoji's partial transformation, minus his controlling parasite. Determined to save his love, he goes after her, and the resulting war explodes with bodily fluids and sexual metaphors.



Sachiko (Aoba Kawai) is turned into an organic weapon a la ***Tetsuo***

Screenwriter Junya Kato (*Death Trance*) does inject some gravitas into what is essentially a popcorn flick. He sets up Yoji as a likeable weakling whose determination to save Sachiko makes him a man – ironic, considering his altered state. But the mythology behind the parasites is too vague, and lengthy exposition scenes tedious.

As for the gore, it's plentiful. Keita Amemiya's creature designs (on display in the special features) are strange and intriguing but ridiculous when realized onscreen. That said, special effects director Toshihiro Nishimura obviously did his best on a small budget. Unfortunately, there's too much machine in *Meatball Machine*, not enough meat. It does have some, ahem, balls, though.

Sean Plummer

NEARLY NEAR DARK

THE THIRST

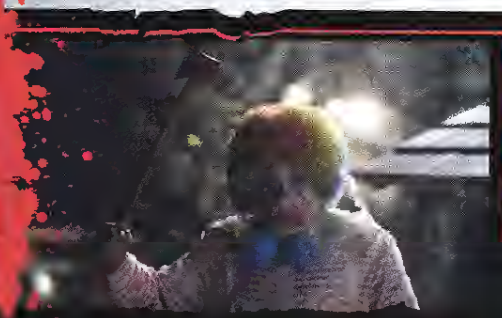
Starring Matt Keeslar, Clare Kramer and Jeremy Sisto
Directed by Jeremy Kasten
Written by Ben Ketai, Mark A. Altman, Liz Maccie, et. al
Anchor Bay

Vampirism as metaphor for drug addiction? Oh joy. Yawn. That was pretty much my reaction when I got saddled with this shoestring neck-nosher, so imagine my shock when *The Thirst* turned out to be pretty freakin' cool, heavy on action and – most importantly – mercifully free of puffy-sleeved Eurotrash.

Co-writer Mark A. Altman describes it as "*Trainspotting* meets *Near Dark*," which is not an inaccurate comparison but not quite adequate either, so here's a spot of plot for ya. Maxx (Matt Keeslar) is convinced that his stripper girlfriend Lisa (Clare Kramer), a recovering drug addict, has relapsed. But things are actually much worse: she's terminally ill and has embraced vampirism as the only alternative to a slow death. The couple takes up with the inevitable colourful gang of nocturnal bloodsuckers and much carnage, catastrophe and soul-searching ensues, culminating in the inevitable *Near Dark*/*Lost Boys*-style clash between our protagonists and the acolytes of alpha-vampire Darius (the charismatic Jeremy Sisto, who in recent years has become a ubiquitous and welcome presence in indie horror film).



Low budget but extremely stylish, *The Thirst* sports some familiar vampire tropes but eschews cliches as often as possible, getting by instead on kick-ass performances and action that's up close, personal and painful. Logic pretty much crashes and burns in the third reel, possibly due to editing problems, but by that point it's easy enough to get swept along by the film's momentum. Extras include director's commentary, an entertaining making-of featurette and a survey of the cast and crew's favourite vampire films. (Warning: *The Lost Boys*, *Interview with the Vampire* and Cop-



A STICKY MESS

WE ALL SCREAM FOR ICE CREAM

Starring Lee Tergesen, William Forsythe and Tim Henry
Directed by Tom Holland
Written by David J. Schow
Anchor Bay



With *The Beast Within*, *Fright Night* and *Child's Play* under his belt, Tom Holland faced high expectations for his *Masters of Horror* episode, "We All Scream for Ice Cream," from horror fans gunning for another fun, bloody romp in the genre. Unfortunately, he delivered a ridiculous, ice cream man-seeking-vengeance-from-beyond film – one of the worst episodes of the series.

First off, clowns just aren't scary; they really haven't been since *Poltergeist* or *It*. So there's not much left to do but gawk at this nonsensical mess when a developmentally challenged soft-serve clown named Buster (a goofy William Forsythe) who was killed in a terrible childhood prank returns from the grave (in his supernatural, fog-shrouded ice cream van) to turn his now grown-up tormentors into gooey puddles of ice cream via their mind-controlled sleepwalking children – who damn their parents by eating popsicles shaped like people!

A few mildly entertaining meltdowns spice up the banality of the story as Buster systematically liquifies the former gang of kids who wronged him. But, staggeringly, the cast – led by prolific television actor Lee Tergesen – manages to play it razor-straight, which is the film's ultimate downfall. A little comedy in such a ludicrous premise could have sweetened the source material.

The script (by horror scribe David J. Schow, whose own much better "Pick Me Up" was adapted by Larry Cohen last year) is based on a short story called "I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream for Ice Cream" by award-winning author John Farris. Obviously not his most inspired tale. Or perhaps, like Stephen King and Clive Barker, some of his stories just work better in print. Either way, forget this gooey mess and save your money for a bucket of Häagen-Dazs.

Jovanka Vuckovic



The Thirst: *Described as "**Trainspotting** meets **Near Dark***

pola's laughable *Bram Stoker's Dracula* get name dropped much more frequently than *Martin* or F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*. What's with these kids today?)

Against all expectations, *The Thirst* has almost restored my faith in latter-day vampire films, at least at the indie level.

John W. Bowen

CLASS DISMISSED

BLOODY REUNION

Starring Seong-won Jang, Dong-kyu Lee and Mi-hee Dh
Directed by Dae-wung Lim
Written by Se-yeol Park
Tartan

Bloody Reunion, a.k.a. *My Teacher*, a.k.a. *To Sir, With Love*(!), grips you right from the start by opening with a teacher giving birth to a hideously deformed baby, causing her distraught husband to commit suicide. It then flashes forward to a scene reminiscent of *Saw*, with the police investigating a dilapidated schoolroom where several people have been tortured to death. And that's the first five minutes.

The pace then slows for an intriguing story revolving around the teacher, now wheelchair-bound, who is visited by former students on her birthday. As the plot progresses it becomes apparent that each of the students holds a secret grudge against



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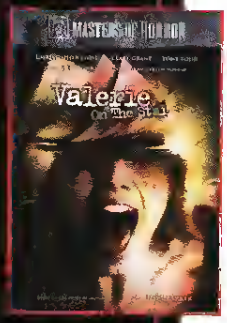
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STEP IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

VALERIE ON THE STAIRS

Starring Tyrone Leitso, Tony Todd and Clare Grant
Written and directed by Mick Garris
Anchor Bay



Some things just don't translate well from printed page to camera lens, but that didn't stop Mick Garris from trying. His adaptation of Clive Barker's story treatment, "Valerie on the Stairs," is the *MoH* creator's season two directorial effort – his season one entry being the not-so-horror but still very well put together "Chocolate" – and while it starts with an intriguing premise, it ends with a literal flutter.

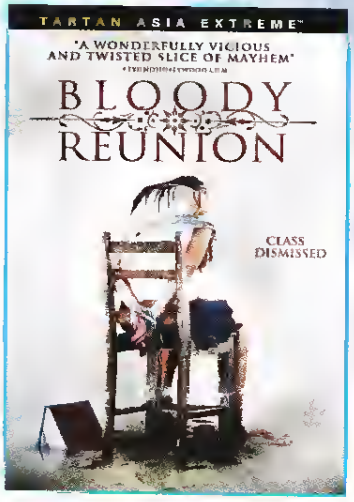
Tyron Leitso, who seems to have survived the taint of co-starring in Uwe Boll's *House of the Dead*, stars as Rob Hanisey, a down-and-out scribe who moves into a boarding house where unpublished writers live rent-free while working on their books. Populated by failed novelists, Highberger House is an utterly depressing haven for the lost and not so profound. Rob does find a friend, though, in fellow struggling writer Bruce (Jonathan Watton), to whom he confides to hearing strange noises, seeing visions of a bloody suicide and meeting the apparition of a gorgeous women on the stairs (yup, Valerie, played by an often-nude Clare Grant) who pleads for his help.

It's a great set-up, full of creaky haunted house tension and creeping dread that recalls Stuart Gordon's *MoH* season one Lovecraft adaptation "Dreams in the Witch-House." Barker's bent is more towards bizarre love, sexuality and the body, though, and as Rob unravels Valerie's mystery, his own desires for her lead him down a demonic path to her sexual enslaver, The Beast (Tony Todd doing a Candyman riff).

Although there's a nice twist in the form of a secret held between several residents – including Everett, played by a suitably frazzled Christopher Lloyd – the tale treads increasingly into ridiculous monster movie territory. And the overly literal literature-themed body horror climax may contain the silliest visuals ever cooked up. Mick, we love you for bringing us *Masters of Horror*, but ixnay on the ookmanbay!

Dave Alexander

her. One was a star athlete until he was cruelly punished by the woman, and now walks with a horrible limp; another was teased because of her weight and has become addicted to plastic surgery; and one that the teacher molested has turned into a pill-popping wreck. Then the film goes into slasher mode as the students are knocked off by a masked killer.



Disturbing highlights include a girl who has her eyelids stapled open and another victim forced to swallow razor blades. As cool as all of that sounds, the real meat of the movie doesn't occur until the last ten minutes when the plot takes an unexpected twist turn redolent of *The Usual Suspects* or *Haute Tension*. It's this part that really elevates the film.

Dae-wung Lim's directorial debut is well-paced and well acted, effectively coupling an evocative, haunting score with some remarkably adept camera work. With the recent glut of K-horror films featuring long-haired ghost girls or cursed objects, it's certainly refreshing to have a Korean director offer something as tantalizingly and unique as *Bloody Reunion*. If only every high school reunion could be this insane.

Last Chance Lance

DULLARDS FOR DINNER

MARCUS

Starring Ross Kurt,
Frankie Ingrassia and Scoot McNairy
Written and directed by Bob Hardison
and Rich Robinson
Warner

It's no secret that some very fucked-up shit can happen at family gatherings – a sorry facet of the human condition that's fuelled literature, theatre and film for as long as anyone can remember. Behaviour that would strain credibility under any other circumstances is perfectly believable in *American Beauty*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* and innumerable angst-fests by Ingmar Bergman, Tennessee Williams and Harold Pinter, to name but a few.

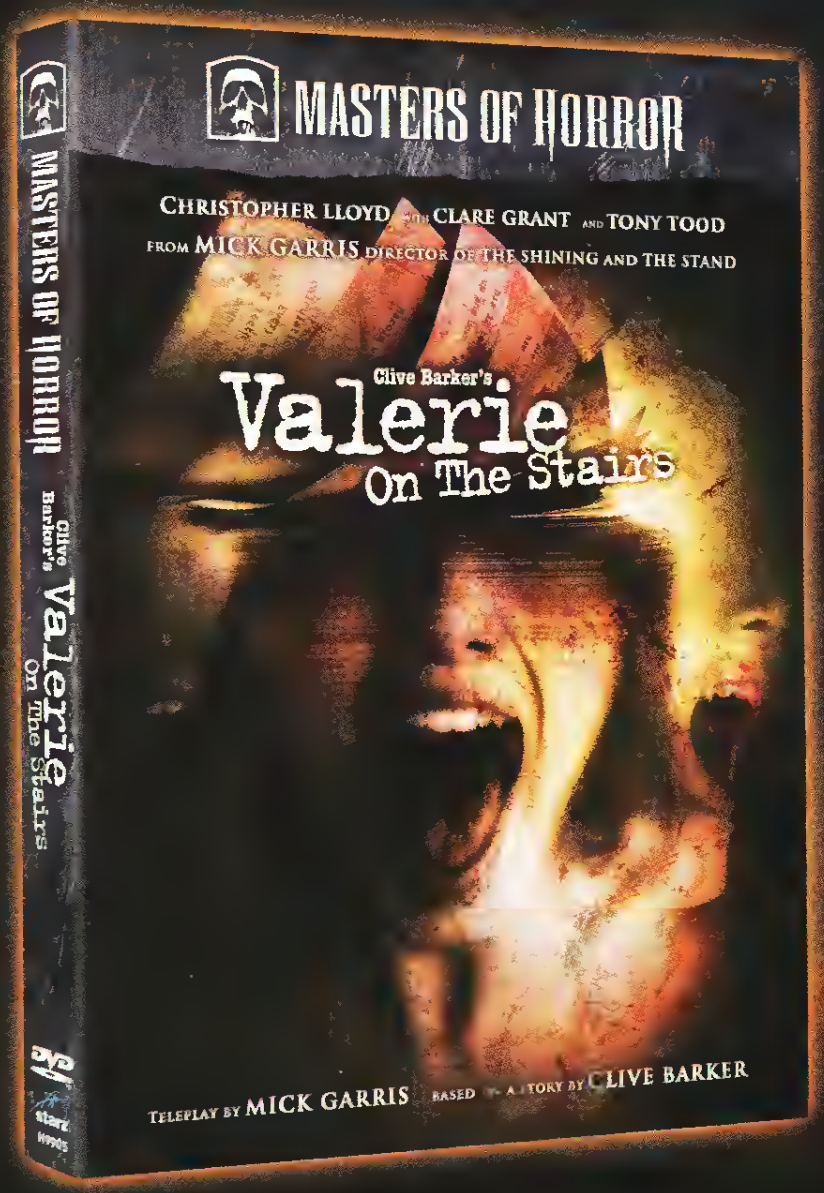
Having served so many dramas and comedies brilliantly, why wouldn't it work as the backdrop for a gory thriller? It should, but not in *Marcus*, which wastes an intriguing premise, solid direction and an ensemble cast of unknown but uniformly talented actors, simply because the script's dynamics are so wrong.

Psycho Marcus (Ross Kurt) holds Brooke (Frankie Ingrassia) prisoner in her bathroom and plays therapist, forcing her to reveal



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From

MICK GARRIS

Creator of MASTERS OF HORROR

STARRING

CHRISTOPHER LLOYD (BACK TO THE FUTURE)

CLARE GRANT (WALK THE LINE)

TONY TODD (CANDYMAN)

It is called Highberger House, a place for unpublished writers to live and work. But this building is haunted by more than just the specter of failed authors. **Christopher Lloyd**, **Tyron Leitso** and **Tony Todd** star in this shocker adapted from the story by horror legend **Clive Barker**.



FEATURES

- ***Spine Tingler: The Making of Valerie On The Stairs*** Featurette
- ***Jump Scare: Editing Valerie***
- **Audio Commentary with Writer/Director Mick Garris**
- **Photo Gallery and More!**

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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS THE GIRLS

OH. MY. GANTH.

GOTH GIRLS



Doorway Productions

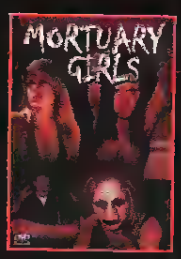
I love goth girls, and I want the world to know! That said, I hate *Goth Girls*, and I want the world to know that too. Divided into two tales of mind-numbing boredom, the first one, "A Deadly Friend," sees a scumbag lawyer banging the most un-goth goth girl ever, only to find out she has a dark, deadly secret. The second one, "Tell-Tale Heart," is a stinker so loosely based on Poe's story that it must have old Edgar cartwheeling in his grave. (The awful jackhammer-alarm clock soundtrack doesn't help matters either.) The only good thing about the disc is a bonus short, a rape-revenge film called *Sinners*. It's got a real goth girl and shoulda been the main attraction.

Body Count: 1

Senseless Stripping Scenes: 3

FUNERAL FUNHOUSE

MORTUARY GIRLS



Southport Video

Though *Mortuary Girls* is plagued by lame acting and half-assed sets, there's actually a pretty tight, campy little story trying to peek its head out of the coffin here. Victor is a college professor whose life goes to shit after his wife dies from a heart attack – while they're having sex! After a trip to the loony bin, he takes up residence at a funeral home and desperately tries to piece his life back together. Everything goes to hell, though, when six college kids break in to get high and have kinky sex on the embalming table. Cue spurting blood and rolling heads. A standout "hot teacher" performance by Elizabeth Moore, imaginative death scenes and a clever finale (open for a sequel) make this movie worth digging… up.

Body Count: 10

Senseless Stripping Scenes: 4

SCHOOL'S OUT FOREVER!

CATHOLIC GHOULGIRLS



Pendulum Pictures

Catholic Ghoulgirls director Eamon Hardiman (*Vampire Whores from Outer Space*) readily admits his film sucks, even stating in the closing credits that it was fuelled by alcohol and drugs. At least the premise was good: three kilt-clad school girls battle the living dead while trying to save their boyfriends and thwart the advances of gun-toting lesbian nuns. Though the movie has a few good gore scenes and a kick-ass soundtrack featuring Electric Frankenstein, The Pistolwhippers and Zombina and the Skeletones, none of that can make up for the fact that the sound quality, camerawork, editing and acting are so fucking bad that the only way you could possibly enjoy this film is if you've suffered severe brain damage. Hmmm… reminds me of my own high school days.

Body Count: 19

Senseless Stripping Scenes: 2

Last Chance Lance



her darkest secrets and details of her dysfunctional family before he bludgeons her. He then lies in wait for her guests to arrive for Christmas dinner, passes himself off as Brooke's new boyfriend and tells them she's been delayed in traffic, all the while pitting them against each other.

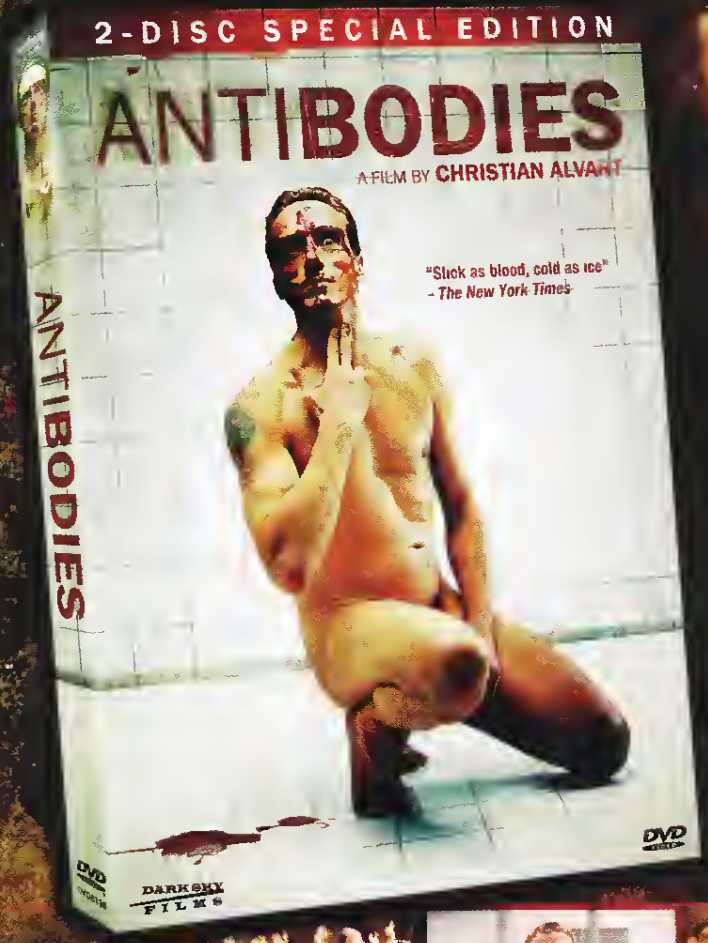
Promising set-up? Hell yeah, but believable relationships are in woefully short supply. For reasons best left to a team of noted psychiatrists to diagnose, Brooke has invited her rageaholic brother, his fiancee, the fiancée's ex-boyfriend and his girlfriend. Bonus: the brother's fiancée's ex-boyfriend also had a previous clandestine fling with Brooke. (Yes, this would all be much clearer with a diagram, but the art department was busy.)

Fireworks ensue, with behaviour ranging from passive-aggressive to full-on fisticuffs. Credibility is further hobbled by the actions of Marcus himself, who, instead of trying to charm the bickering couples while playing his power games, is nothing but rude and domineering from the get-go. Irrational behaviour is historically commonplace in both horror films and family dramas, but with so much open hostility fouling the air it's reasonable to expect at least one or two of these people to storm out instead of waiting around long enough for Marcus to dispatch them one at a time in gory and unbelievable fashion. Despite so many promising ingredients, this one's exceedingly unpleasant without really delivering on any of the thrills or high drama it promises.

John W. Bowen

"YOU'RE GOOD... I'M EVIL... THOSE ARE THE ROLES."

"An entertaining thriller that puts its own spin on the... serial killer genre."
- Aintitcoolnews.com





Berlin police apprehend the alleged killer of 13 children, but prime suspect Gabriel Engel (DOWNFALL's André Hennicke) will speak only to Michael Martens, a small town constable (ANATOMY 2's Wotan Wilke Möhring) whose own teenaged son is manifesting the classic early signs of a serial killer.

This tense, violent thriller from writer-director Christian Alvart (CASE 39) combines elements from the classic mind game thrillers THE WICKER MAN, THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, and SE7EN and was an audience favorite at the 2005 Edinburgh Film Festival.

"... gruesome and twisted ... jaw dropping"
- Bloody-disgusting.com



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CINEMACABRE PRESENTS

Indie and D.I.Y. films reviewed

Blood on a Budget

Reviews by Chris Alexander, Stuart Andrews and Paul Corupe

Black Dahlia Movie

blackdahliamovie.com

Director Ramzi Abed's pseudo-Lynchian take on Hollywood's most famous unsolved murder case is not so much a movie about the Black Dahlia as it is a movie about a *movie about* the Black Dahlia. *Black Dahlia Movie* stars the immensely captivating Kristen Kerr (featured in David Lynch's latest epic, *Inland Empire*) as Lisa Small, a modern-day ingénue out to land the part of Elizabeth Short (a.k.a the Black Dahlia) in yet another film adaptation about the 1947 Hollywood murder victim. As Small gets deeper into the role, she begins to channel the spirit of the Black Dahlia herself, a connection that's further fuelled by a Dahlia-obsessed psycho who's bounding around Tinseltown bumping off every tasty brunette he can get his hands on. Despite an array of colourful cameos (including an extremely brief but surprisingly serious turn by Lloyd Kaufman), *Black Dahlia Movie* suffers marginally from some insufficiently developed characters. However, it's in the sultry, dream-like sequences depicting the budding Black Dahlia during her intimate moments where this film really bursts to life. There's a legitimately intoxicating and sensual quality that practically hypnotizes the viewer and, at its core, captures the enduring mystique of the Black Dahlia far better than De Palma's disappointing, cold-fish interpretation. **SA**



Far better than De Palma's disappointing interpretation.

Tiki

retromedia.org

Ah, the wood-carved Tiki god – it invokes warm tropical breezes, memories of frosty mai tais on the beach, and, in some cases, a badly articulated puppet on your shoulder, trying to decapitate you. *Tiki*, Ron Ford's tribute to Full Moon's killer doll cheesefests of the 1980s, pounces on the recently renewed interest in the Polynesian pop icon with a well-worn plot about a shy college student who is embarrassed by her cruel peers and subsequently channels her murderous rage into a small Tiki figurine. Limited to wiggling its tiny arms and legs, the puppet lacks personality as it slices and dices through a bevy of amateur actors. But what's really disappointing is that there's little here specific to the Tiki – this could be about a lethal teddy bear or a homicidal coffee maker, you would only have to change about three lines of dialogue. Shame, because a real story about a towering Polynesian deity seeking revenge in a shadowy South Seas location would make a great horror film. Ford's *Tiki* is suitably campy and contains some reasonably crafted gore, but it's still a long way from even Full Moon's level of quality, which should tell you something. Only worth viewing if you're stranded on a desert isle. **PC**



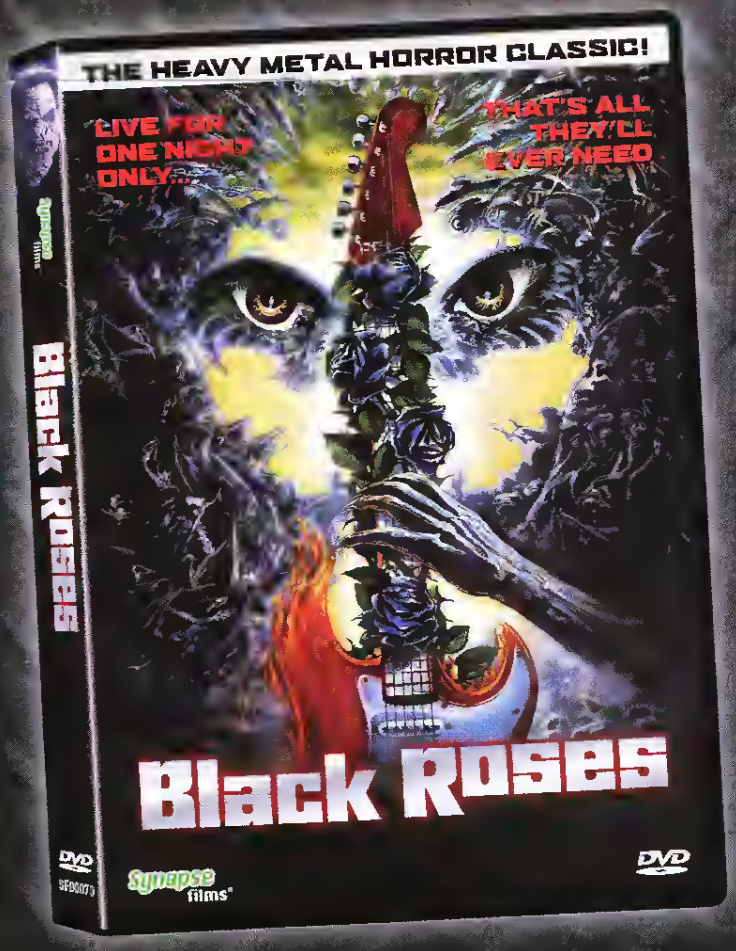
Gag

gagthemovie.com

Finally, an indie horror film that lives up its title! Scott W. McKinlay's juvenile and derivative *Gag* will make you do just that, though not for any particularly visceral reasons. Rather, this dire little D.I.Y. exploitation quickie is yet another in a seemingly endless line of post-*Saw* torture-porn flicks that get curiously duller the more disgusting they get. Brian Kolodziej (who also stars in something called *Gay Robot*!) is a whiny, tank top-wearing psychopath who traps two burglars in his bargain-basement lair during a botched home invasion, then uses them to play out a sadistic, excessively violent game of pain. *Gag* is indeed a plodding dud, though if you're really desperate, it does sport a few choice moments of admittedly nifty gore, including graphic cannibalism and forced glass eating. Plus there's the rat-forced-down-a-tube-into-the-mouth gag, cribbed from Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* novel. You've seen it all before, however, and it's truly confounding as to why the filmmakers would chose to pour so much energy into such a blatant rip-off of a superior, often ripped-off, blockbuster genre film. For all its manufactured cruelty, *Gag* is a tired, lame and laughably sombre waste of time. Better luck next time, boys! **CA**



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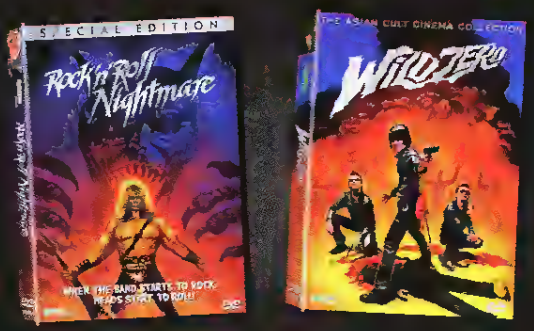
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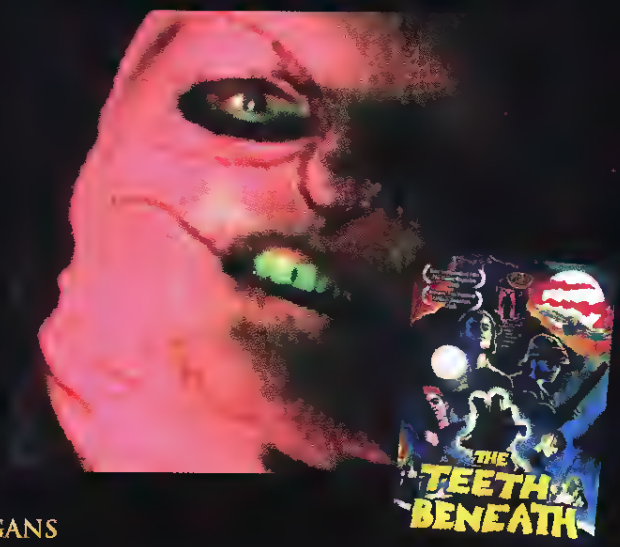
ABBREVIATED TERRORS

REVIEWS BY BOB BARROW, PAUL COLUPE AND LAST CHANCE LANCE

THE TEETH BENEATH

45 mins

teethbeneath.com



With a title like that it's no surprise *The Teeth Beneath* is fun and fast-paced. It was co-directed by Canadian Jason Eisener, one of the talents behind the brilliant trailer that played in front of *Grindhouse*, *Hobo With a Shotgun*. Somewhere between *Evil Dead* and *Clerks*, the film revolves around a crew of slacker skate shop employees who must do battle against the forces of evil hidden in their store's shadowy basement *and* clean up the bloody mess – all before opening time in one hour. Shot primarily at Pro Skates, co-director Zach Tovey's Halifax-based store, and embellished with occasional flashes of skateboarding, *The Teeth Beneath* may not be the most original indie horror out there, but it's still a skillfully crafted, frequently funny flick that gleefully bounds through a library of B-movie clichés: gratuitous gore, ass-whupping kung fu, a deadly spear gun and a soundtrack of rock 'n' roll and John Carpenter-styled retro synth. Bolstered by a sincere intent to entertain, it's a worthwhile film that really squeezes the most out of its miniscule budget, and – along with the spot-on *Hobo With a Shotgun* – makes Eisener a name to look out for. **PC**

THE GHOULIGANS

50 mins

theghouligans.com



Homage is a tricky thing. Sometimes paying tribute to a favourite film works, but more often than not it falls flat on its face. In the case of *The Ghouligans*, from New York-based filmmakers the Slack Pack, it works by giving classic movie monsters (Dracula, Frankenstein, The Wolf Man, plus a zombie) a '60s-style overhaul complete with surf tunes and go-go dancers. Presented in a series of short episodes, the film follows the creatures' slapstick adventures involving a day at the beach, soccer games against a team of mummies and an ongoing battle between Frankenstein and his haunted car. Although the effects make *The Munsters* look like a million dollar show, it's obvious the filmmakers are having fun with the source material. An infectious Saturday morning cartoon vibe works with the low-budget gags and black and white retro monochrome palette. The only major problem here is the lack of a unifying plot; some shorts have credits and intros, some don't, which can be confusing. *The Ghouligans* probably won't jive with the "serious" horror fan, but the twelve-year-old in the rest of us will have a ghastly good time. **BB**

RAY HARRYHAUSEN PRESENTS: THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

7 mins

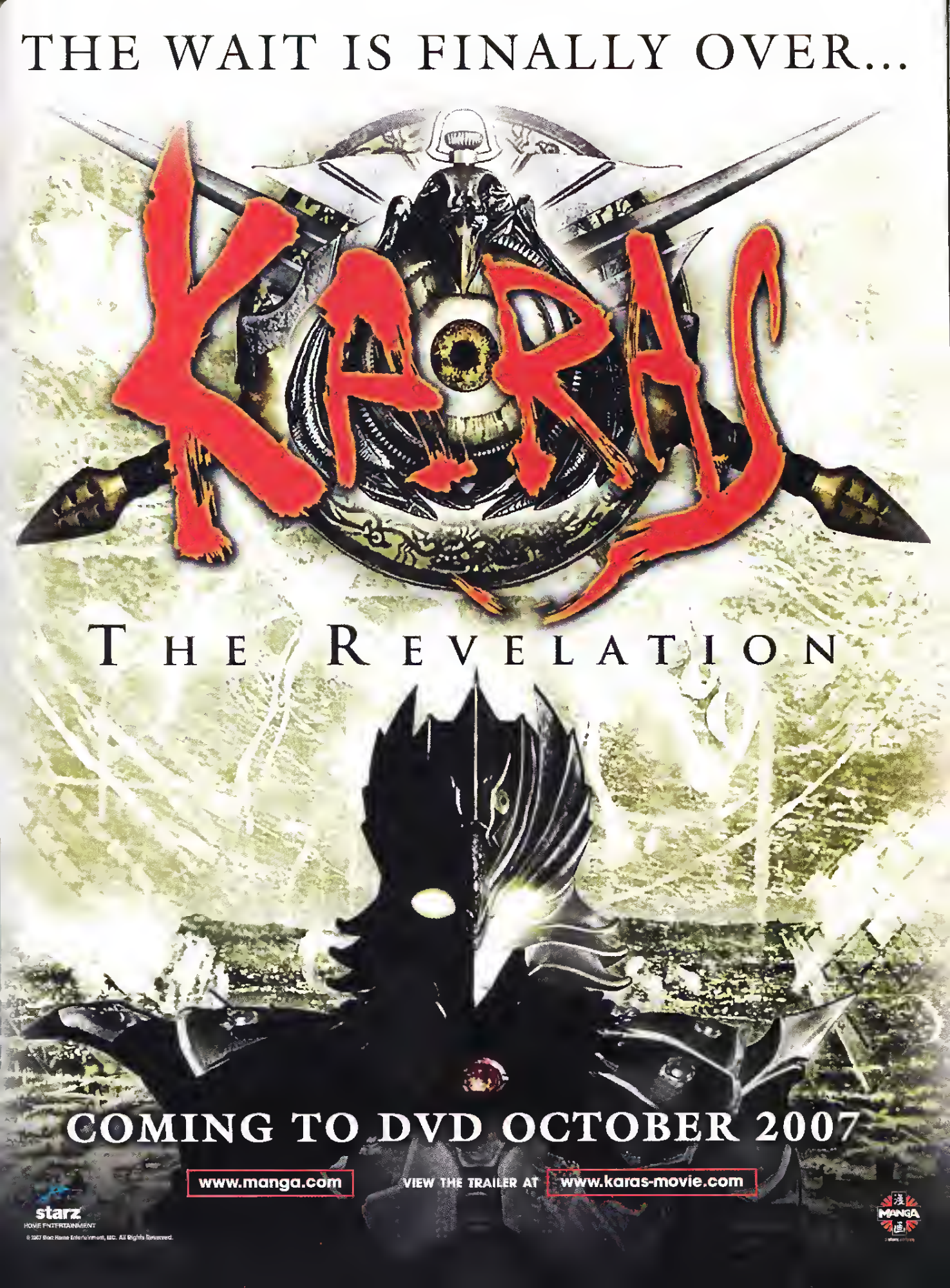
thepitandthependulumshortfilm.com



It's a given: Ray Harryhausen is the undisputed king of stop-motion animation. And after having brought to life fantastic creatures in everything from *Sinbad* to *Clash of the Titans*, Harryhausen, who turned 87 this year, now lends his name and expertise to promote a new generation of stop-motion artists. Marc Lougee (*What It's Like Being Alone*) was selected to helm *The Pit and the Pendulum* (adapted by Matt Taylor), the first in a series of Poe-inspired shorts under the Ray Harryhausen Presents banner.

Set in a prison during the Spanish Inquisition, it details the brutal treatment of a nameless, blindfolded prisoner who is condemned to death by a group of cloaked prosecutors and thrown into a rat-infested cell where he comes face to face with the deadly pit and that massive swinging pendulum.

Running about seven minutes, this is a dark, dreary film with amazing sets wonderfully marred with decay and despair. The subtle, swirling soundtrack, which is filled with the whimpers and screams of hapless souls in their final throes, perfectly complements the creepy visuals. The film has already made the rounds at a number of film festivals and horror conventions, and the trailer is available online. Mr. Poe would be proud. **LCL**


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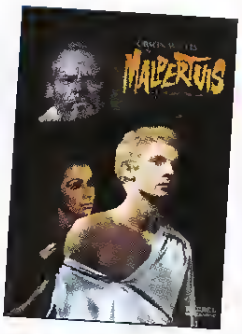
Malpertuis: Harry Kümel's surreal, phantasmagoric follow-up to **Daughters of Darkness.**

HARRY'S HOUSE OF EVIL

MALPERTUIS (1972)

Starring Mathieu Carrière, Susan Hampshire and Orson Welles
Directed by Harry Kümel
Written by Jean Ferry
Barrel Entertainment

Historically, directors with hit movies get to indulge themselves once. Unfortunately, that indulgence is usually accompanied by either studio interference or box office indifference. To wit: *Malpertuis* co-star Orson Welles made *The Magnificent Ambersons* after *Citizen Kane* and saw it cut to pieces by RKO.



Likewise, Belgian director Harry Kümel had a hit with 1971's *Daughters of Darkness*. Its combination of blood, sex, sensuality and humour was a box office sensation which earned it horror cult status. His follow-up, *Malpertuis* (1972), however, has been essentially lost. Originally entered at Cannes in a dubbed, dubiously edited version, the adaptation of Belgian author Jean Ray's surreal novel lost money and faded into obscurity.

Thanks to Barrel Entertainment, however, the film lives on in this handsome two-disc release. Less beholden to genre convention than *Daughters*, *Malpertuis* is a surreal phantasmagoria that takes the black humour and sensuality of *Daughters* and plays with it in the realm of fantasy instead of pure horror. Mathieu Carrière, a blonde, pale, effete vision of handsomeness, stars as Jan, a sailor returned to his small Belgian hometown. Through weirdly empty streets, he pursues his sister Nancy (Susan Hampshire). A violent confrontation leads him back to Malpertuis, the damned home of his uncle Cassavius (Welles). Malpertuis, it seems, is populated by Cassavius' eccentric relations, all of whom are waiting for the hungry ogre to die so they may leave the house which, to them, has become a prison. But their relation to Cassavius is dubious, and the truth of their familiarity leads to a spiralling descent into madness which is genuinely disturbing.

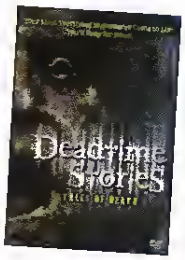
Malpertuis is a bizarre film. It mashes together the beautiful, the surreal, the horrific and the humorous into a cinematic punch which leaves the viewer breathless but craving more. In terms of presentation, Barrel has crafted a handsome package which includes not only Kümel's 119-minute director's cut but the original 100-minute Cannes dub, as well as interviews with author Jean Ray, star Susan Hampshire and the director, plus a featurette on co-star Welles, whose presence, fortunately, dominates but does not capsize Kümel's film. Not exactly horror, *Malpertuis* is a study in both beauty and dread.

Sean Plummer

CHEESE BEFORE BED

DEADTIME STORIES (1987)

Starring Scott Valentine, Melissa Leo and Nicole Picard
Directed by Jeffrey Delman
Written by Jeffrey Delman, J. Edward Kiernan and Charles F. Shelton
Image



Back in 1987 when writer/director Jeffrey (*Voodoo Dawn*) Delman's ultra-cheap horror anthology *Deadtime Stories* was released on home video, its biggest selling point was a starring turn by *Family Ties* co-star Scott Valentine (he played Mallory's roughneck lover Nick, in case you forgot). Now that the mouldy movie is finally making its not-so-anticipated DVD debut, that meagre distinction holds little, if any, commercial weight, which leads one to question how many folks actually will want to watch it at all. The answer is, unless you're the kind of schmuck really smitten by nickel-and-dime '80s cheese (of which this critic most certainly is), not a whole heck of a lot.

Obviously inspired by the classic Romero/King collaboration *Creepshow*, *Deadtime Stories*' framing device sees a whiny little moppet begging his dopey uncle to tell him a few stories before turning in. Said uncle obliges, opting to spin the ensuing trilogy of low-budget terror. In the first installment, Valentine plays Peter, an obliging slave to two ghoulish witches trying to resurrect their long dead, and much hotter, sister. When the hags send Peter out to fetch the local busty blonde virgin, he has a change of heart and tries to stop the ladies' snaggle-toothed reign of terror. The second story remounts *Little Red Riding Hood* as a

amusing *Pretty in Pink*-esque werewolf tale, complete with a cheesy "Duckie"-style love interest and fanged grandma aggressor. The third, and worst, is a psycho killer riff on *Goldilocks* that's played strictly for laughs, but does boast a few bright spots from TV vet Melissa Leo (*Homicide: Life on the Streets*) as the matriarch of the "Baer" family.

Make no mistake, *Deadtime Stories* is not good by any stretch, but the 16mm effort's backyard, blood-spattered horror histrionics are far more compelling and accomplished than half the DIY dreck currently on the market. If you dig junk like Jeff Burr's *The Offspring* or Daniel Boyd's *Chillers* (both also from 1987) than *Deadtime Stories* might just turn your page.

Chris Alexander

MY PET CAVEMAN

TROG (1970)
Starring Joan Crawford,
Michael Gough and Joe Cornelius
Directed by Freddie Francis
Written by Peter Bryan, John Gilling
and Aben Kandel
Warner Brothers





Joe Cornelius as the primitive title character, Trog

Pity the ultimate fate of Hollywood's most glamorous leading ladies. As they are usurped by wave upon wave of aspiring starlets, the aging celebrities are consigned to the fringes of an industry they once dominated. This was especially true in the 1970s, when drive-ins were packed with viewers eager to see a star like Joan Collins embarrass herself in the *Empire of the Ants*, or a disgraced Olivia de Havilland half-heartedly fighting off The Swarm. Those deliberately tacky films, however, seem fairly respectable compared to Hammer horror alumnus Freddie Francis' dismal caveman potboiler *Trog*, which afforded Oscar-winner Joan Crawford her final big-screen appearance.

Here, Crawford is Dr. Brockton, an iron-willed anthropologist who believes she has discovered the missing link between man and ape living in a cave in small-town Britain. This troglodyte (Joe Cornelius) – whom she nicknames "Trog" for short – may be an important specimen, but reactionary community leader Sam Murdock (Michael Gough) is convinced he's an uncivilized beast. Brockton disagrees and inexplicably decides she must teach Trog how to play with dolls, appreciate classical music and learn to speak. The result has *Trog* coming off less as a creature feature than some demented update of *My Fair Lady*, only with tranquilizer guns and people constantly being pelted with Styrofoam rocks.

Producer Herman Cohen had cranked out many 1950s and 1960s B-classics, including *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* and *Konga*, which may explain why *Trog* feels like such an artistic throwback. But at least those films were fun. Aside from a few unintended laughs, *Trog* quickly sinks into triviality, with just as much screen time given to Crawford and her caveman playing catch than the final reel's predictable prehistoric rampage.

Surely the oddest thing about the film is that Crawford treats the trashy material with surprising sincerity, even as she's noticeably reading off-camera cue cards. Consequently, her performance is the only aspect that keeps the film interesting amid substandard make-up and recycled black and white stop-motion dinosaur footage. Unfortunately, those B-film archeologists hoping to uncover a significant find on WB's new DVD release of *Trog* will find it's little more than a minor historical curiosity.

Paul Corupe







STOP-MOTION MEH-HEM

THE GIANT BEHEMOTH (1959)

Starring Gene Evans, André Morell and John Turner
Directed by Eugène Lourié
Written by Robert Abel, Alan J. Adler, Eugène Lourié, et el.
Warner Brothers



If the main reason you watch giant monster movies is to see guys in lab coats discuss the finer points of marine biology, then you're in for a treat with Warner's newly released DVD of *The Giant Behemoth*. Director Eugène Lourié had virtually pioneered the marauding monster genre with the classic destruction of 1953's *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, but *The Giant Behemoth* is a disappointingly limp chaser – a talky, overly familiar film that's easily stomped by kaiju's A-list.

Even 1959 audiences would have found the plot musty, since the script never deviates one bit from the monster movie playbook. After rampant atomic testing, a huge mutated lizard is spotted in a small coastal town. While authorities investigate, the creature reappears and demolishes a few national monuments from a major metropolitan city (this time London). Armies are deployed and various scientists wring their hands until it's finally destroyed.

Too bad *The Giant Behemoth*'s wanton destruction and effects work were crammed into the final fifteen minutes, a meagre reward for watching endless scenes of diligent marine researchers probing the ramifications of atomic testing. You've got to admire the screenwriter's insistence on injecting some real scientific theories into the film, but in the end this only serves to further frustrate monster-philes and effects geeks eager for a glimpse of the beast.

Even then, *The Giant Behemoth* may go down in history as the big white elephant on legendary stop-motion master Willis O'Brien's resumé. While the precise extent of the *King Kong* animator's involvement with the film is still debated and a lack of funds clearly was a factor, it's an undeniably dreary effort no matter who's responsible. A few shots of the beast busting through power lines, a crude Nessie-like design and some painfully awful model work simply can't compete with Harryhausen's earlier endeavours.

It's little surprise Lourié's next epic, *Gorgo*, dispensed with animation and went with the cost-effective rubber suit. *The Giant Behemoth* prevails as an ignoble finale to O'Brien's career and a worrisome sign of things to come for the stop-motion giant monster film in general.

Paul Corupe

HANDY-CAPABLE

SPLATTER FARM (1988)

Starring Mark Polonia, John Polonia and Marion Costly
Written and directed by John and Mark Polonia
Camp Motion Pictures

Largely because the technology has improved by leaps and bounds while becoming more affordable, shot-on-video micro-budget productions have become increasingly commonplace since the late 1990s. It's a thriving subculture within the indie horror scene, and one we've come to take for granted. But the tools of the trade weren't always so user-friendly, as evidenced in 1988's *Splatter Farm*.



In this barely competent yet endearing backyard epic, two slack-jawed identical twins – with identically ill-advised moustaches – visit their aunt and her son on a farm during summer vacation and soon suspect that cousin Jeremy just ain't right in the head. As we learn from the opening scene, the boy has a thing for chopping up locals and amusing himself in nasty ways with the remains.

Real-life twin brothers Mark and John Polonia, who also wrote and directed, look like extras from *Napoleon Dynamite* in the film, and Marion Costly's somnambulistic, droning turn as necrophiliac Aunt Lacey begs comparisons to Mark Borchardt's drunken, doddering uncle in *American Movie*. Still, as amateurish and clumsy as *Splatter Farm* may be, it's the product of a couple of teenagers with a camcorder, a primitive, frequently malfunctioning editing machine and a love of '70s and early '80s splatter films. And while the homemade gore effects are decidedly sub-Fulci, no one can fault the brothers Polonia for lack of sheer audacity. (Ex: death by dynamite-dildo!) Happily, the moustaches have at last reached full estate in *Back to the Farm*, a featurette on Camp Video's new reissue, as the lads reminisce about their misadventures in Handycam land.

Whatever asshole came up with "a good craftsman never blames his tools," never had to change a tire with a monkey wrench, and it's a safe bet he never tried to shoot a feature film on a camcorder either.

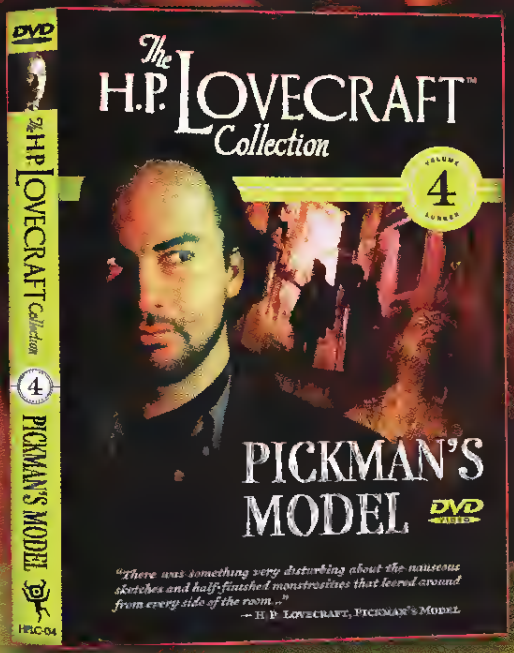
John W. Bowen





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AN (UN)BURIED TREASURE

THE MUMMY'S HAND (1940)

Starring Dick Foran, Wallace Ford and George Zucco
Directed by Christy Cabanne
Written by Griffin Jay and Maxwell Shane
Universal



An archaeologist faces off with The Mummy (Tom Tyler) in the in-name-only sequel ***The Mummy's Hand***

If there's one thing you can't accuse Universal of, it's ignoring its stable of classic monster movies from the 1930s and '40s. It seems that every few years Dracula, Frankenstein, the Wolf Man, the Mummy and all their creature companions are called upon to rise from their eternal slumbers and once again ravage the home video market. Case in point: *The Mummy*'s first sequel, *The Mummy's Hand*, has been on DVD almost since the beginning of the medium, and was later collected definitively in 2004's *The Mummy: The Legacy Collection*. Still, that hasn't stopped Universal from going back to the tana tree yet again to re-release the film on a budget-priced DVD along with its inferior follow-up, *The Mummy's Tomb*.



While not as widely seen as Karloff's brilliant turn as the supernaturally powerful Im-ho-tep in the original film, *The Mummy's Hand* is something of an overlooked gem, a surprisingly competent and influential creature feature that clearly moulded what started as a loose reworking of *Dracula* into its own distinctive series. It was this sequel-in-name-only, not the original, which later served as the basis for Hammer's 1959 remake, and several aspects also found their way into the 1999 update, making *The Mummy's Hand* as much as an authority on the bandaged baddie subgenre as *The Mummy* itself.

Released today, *The Mummy's Hand* would no doubt have been promoted as a "franchise reboot." Taking some of the base elements of the first film – an era-spanning love story, an ancient Egyptian curse and the resurrection of the dead – this B-programmer is a virtual rewrite of the original story that follows would-be archaeologists Steve Banning (Dick Foran) and Babe Jenson (Wallace Ford) on their quest to uncover the jewel-stuffed tomb of Princess Ananka. Learning of their plans, the High Priest (George Zucco) of a shadowy Egyptian cult brews an ancient serum of tana leaves to reanimate the mummified remains of Ananka's buried-alive lover, Kharis (Tom Tyler), and orders the shambling monster to kill any who dare violate her place of rest.

While Karloff's *The Mummy* exploited the alleged curse that was blamed for the deaths of many in Howard Carter's archeological crew after they uncovered King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, this film, released eight years later, fundamentally changes the nature of the monster from the embodiment of an ancient, incomprehensible evil into a lumbering instrument of death. As with many of the later *Frankenstein* sequels that put Mary Shelley's unwitting creature under the control of the vengeful Ygor, it's not Kharis who is the film's real death-dealing threat, but the modern-day adherents to ancient Egyptian beliefs. With its self-brought curse, *The Mummy* may have questioned the morality and unintended consequences of recovering and removing cultural treasures from foreign countries, but *The Mummy's Hand* (as well as its sequels, which followed the same essential storyline) is firm in its belief that archeologists are entitled to all the Egyptian burial artifacts that they can plunder for American and British museums, and only those who would oppose their actions as religious blasphemy are truly dangerous.

One of the most interesting aspects of *The Mummy's Hand* is that Universal opted not to cast one of their usual horror icons underneath the tattered and mouldy Mummy wrapping. Instead, aging western star and stuntman Tom Tyler gives an iconic performance as the undead creature, who drags his stiff limbs across a dusty crypt floor on his quest for another swig of life-giving tana juice. The makeup, once again by Jack Pierce, is a very good imitation of the work he did for Karloff, but it is a post-production touch that really makes Tyler's take on the creature so memorable – a shaky optical effect that turns the creature's eyes into a strangely entrancing and slightly unnerving black void. This effect was, unfortunately, dropped for the remaining, increasingly silly sequels, which saw a more expected figure, Lon Chaney Jr., take over as the titular monster.

While it never reaches the exciting heights of its predecessor, *The Mummy's Hand* is an influential and fun sequel that packs in impressive production values beyond its meagre budget – including a vast Egyptian tomb set borrowed from James Whale's *Green Hell* – making it more than deserving of another look by those who may have missed Universal's previous DVD resurrections.

Paul Corupe



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"THE DEVIL'S NIGHTMARE IS ONE FILM THAT EVERY GOOD LITTLE TRASH MOVIE MUTHAFUCKA NEEDS TO SEE."

THE MAD MUSINGS OF A SCHIZOID CINEPHILE



by Chris Alexander

According to the Bible, if you habitually indulge in any combination of the Seven Deadly Sins, you'll spend an eternity broiling in the flaming chasms of perdition once you croak. However, according to director Jean Brismée's 1971 Belgian/Italian exploitation horror opus *The Devil's Nightmare*, any dabblings in capital vice will instead conjure up a see-through negligee-clad Erika Blanc (*The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave, Kill Baby Kill*) to shake her Beelzebub-ian booty before bringing your naughty ass down. Methinks the latter fate is far preferable to the former, and certainly sitting through this unsung Eurotrash sleaze gem (which has haunted the public domain under mynad titles) is an even sweeter punishment. If you've seen it, you'll understand my mad musings thus far. If you haven't, read on...



The Devil's Nightmare

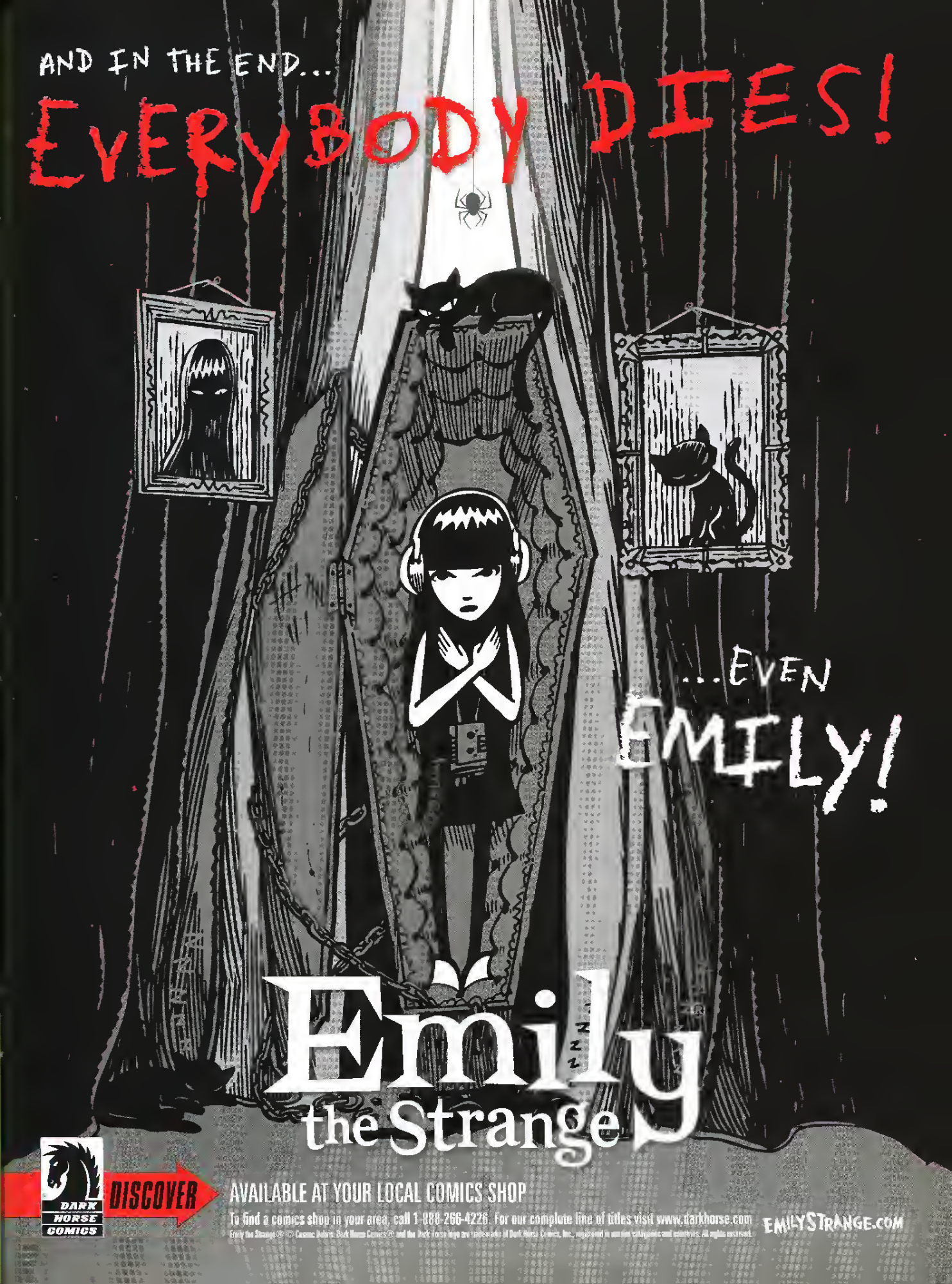
The Devil's Nightmare begins in sepia-toned Berlin during the waning days of WWII as, amidst stock footage of exploding bombs, the Baroness Von Rhoneberg squeezes out the Baron's first-born child... and dies for her troubles. Profoundly depressed, the good Baron's (Jean Servais) sad state deepens when he discovers that said child is not the son for which he had hoped, but a daughter, a sign that he believes will bring upon a centuries-old satanic family curse. In a shocking but shoddy scene, the squealing infant is impaled upon the end of a soldier's bayonet.



Flash forward 25 years. A bus full of generally repellent tourists breaks down on a mountainside and, after a chance encounter with a sickly skinny, sinister shepherd (Daniel Emilfork: *City of Lost Children*) they're directed to the Baron's imposing, decrepit castle. Once there, the motley crew – which includes the gluttonous bus driver, a lecherous husband, a money-grubbing wench, an angry old man, a jealous wife, a morally conflicted priest and, um, a couple of hot lesbians – encounter a guest that even Edward Gorey couldn't have imagined. They're introduced to the Amazonian, hotter-than-Hell and barely clothed succubus Lisa Muller (Blanc), who leads each and every one of these symbolic sinners to a series of fates worse than death.

For those of you who love lurid Gothic horror romps (think Antonio Margheriti's *The Virgin of Nuremberg*), this tacky, absolutely terrific potboiler offers many grimy charms. First and foremost is the dynamite fuzz guitar score by the great Alessandro Alessandroni (*Lady Frankenstein*). It's killer, especially the opening credits theme with its delayed female vocals seeping over scenes of the decayed Von Rhoneberg estate. The production design by French pom vet (and Jean Rollin regular) Jio Berk is cheap but incredibly effective, the pre-*Se7en* mortal sins-themed script by Brismée and producer Pierre-Claude Garnier (Jess Franco's *Midnight Party*) is tight and clever, and the semi-explicit lesbian sex scene is smoldering. (Yes, I'm a pervert, what's it to you?)

Ultimately, the real reason you want to check out the long-ignored *Devil's Nightmare* is for Blanc. Whether coyly slinking across the screen in cleavage-revealing, hip-hugging black silk or stretching her skin in hideously ugly, pasty and lipless menace, Lady Blanc simply owns the film. She's sexy, scary, sweet and positively magnetic. Still going strong at 69, the ever lovely actress may put this particular picture low on her resume, but I've yet to see her – hell, I've yet to see *any* Eurohorror actress – perform this brilliantly in any film of this kind. Available from several nickel and dime distributors (with a print usually culled from UK's Redemption Films), *The Devil's Nightare* is not only a movie that needs a proper DVD release, it's one that every good little trash movie muthafucka *needs* to see. Alexander out.



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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

15¢

IN THIS ISSUE!

HOUSE
Josh Simmons *Fantagraphics*

ANITA BLAKE, VAMPIRE HUNTER: GUILTY PLEASURES VOL. 1 HC
Various *Marvel*

CTHULHU TALES VOL. 3
Various *BOOM!*

EDMUND AND ROSEMARY GO TO HELL
Bruce Eric Kaplan *Simon & Schuster*

LOVELESS #1-19
Brian Azzarello and various *DC/Vertigo*

OF SCENES AND STORIES TPB
Gary Reed and various *Desperado*

THE SAGA OF THE BLOODY BENDERS HC
Rick Geary *ComicsLit DC/Vertigo*

Motion pictures consistently argue for the crucial importance of sound. Consider that John Carpenter could not get backing for *Halloween* until he laid down his self-penned score on its demo reels. But what works in one medium might follow a completely different, even arbitrary, set of rules in another. And while comic books can be quite cinematic, they are not cinema.

In this context, up-and-coming Portland writer/artist Josh Simmons' *House* is a deft study in the terrifyingly unpredictable. On the surface, it's a tale of trespassing gone horribly awry (to the point of becoming a claustrophobic descent into physical and existential hell). But it's a wordless descent, with nary a verbal assay in over 100 pages. Silence here is not only golden, it speaks volumes.

Best-known for the satirical comic *Happy*, Simmons says that his first full-length graphic novel, three years in the making, was intended to be a wordless horror from the start. "My works previous to this were way too wordy," he offers, ironically voiceless via email. "I do like the effect and atmosphere created by the lack of words."

There is a great deal to like. The effect and atmosphere are palpable. Three backpacking youths – two girlfriends and a lone man – meet at the site of a boarded-up country mansion. They break into the surreal building and soon pass a point of no return, in a sub-basement's sub-basement, trapped in an impossible cobblestone labyrinth. That they eventually shout, beg for help – to each other, to anyone – is undeniable. But Simmons' wordless approach slyly sides with the house. It both renders the youths powerless by taking away their voices, and represents the building's response: cold, black silence.



Sound and lack thereof is but one of Simmons' strong-arm narrative tactics. Space and shading are also his weapons. The book opens in "widescreen," with a two-page spread showing the male youth in a big-sky field, passing a tiny cottage. There's an average of three panels per page for the first third of the story (at which point the youths have completed their preliminary exploration of the mansion). In terms of colour, the black and white book's first third emphasizes whitespace, even inside the mansion, where upper floors are all daylight window-lit.

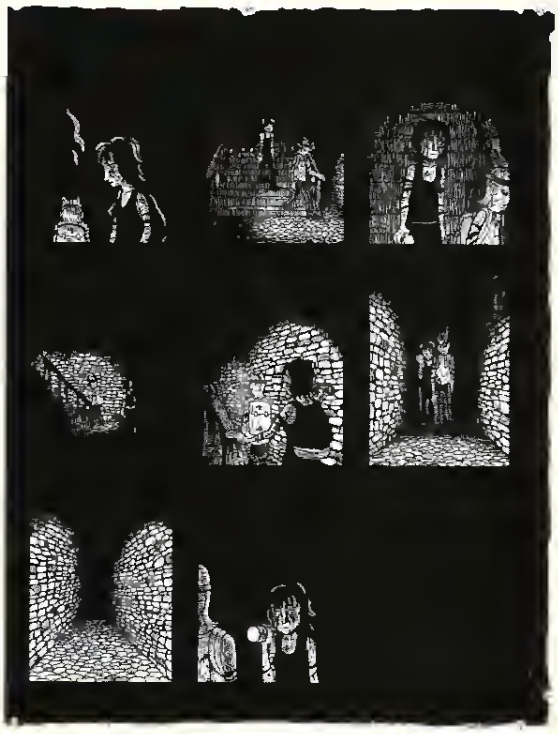
Soon, of course, a secret passage is discovered below an austere portrait, and everything takes a turn for the claustrophobic and black. Nine panels per page is the average in the book's final third, and white is all but drowned out by the blanketing effect of subterranean night – the youths' hopes fading with the batteries in their headlamps.

For *House*, Simmons' drew inspiration from the books *House of Leaves*, an untranslated version of the manga *Dragonhead* and Jung's *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. "I've also had a fixation for a number of years, tracking the gradual disintegration of people/situations/events, and this is my last word on that," he says, citing *Night of the Living Dead*. "You slowly see the people fuck themselves over, on top of being in an impossible situation. It's like watching a horrible car crash in very slow motion."

House was perhaps most influenced, however, by the real-life location that inspired the book's (debatably) haunted setting. New England's Danvers State Mental Institution. Now closed-for-business and boarded-up, it was the basis for H.P. Lovecraft's Arkham Asylum and the location in which cult favourite *Session 9* was filmed (facts of which Simmons was unaware, oddly).

"I did explore the building with some friends a couple times," he says, adding that his group broke in exactly the same way his characters do. "It's a fabulous, gargantuan structure, with many similar rooms and hallways, as I drew in the book. I did of course mutate [it] and add on to much of it, inventing a fair amount."

This is to say that Simmons and his friends escaped. What happens in *House*, though, stays in house – to learn the truth, you'll have to explore it yourself. Please turn off all cellphones and pagers; they won't help you, anyhow.



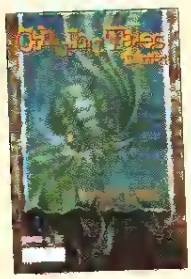
Screams become trapped in the cobblestone hallways of Josh Simmons' breathtaking ***House***

QUICK CUTS

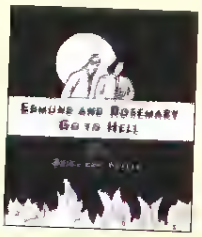
REVIEWS BY DAVE ALEXANDER, GARY BUTLER AND MARK MOYES



Like politics, horror makes for strange bedfellows. Just ask a certain professional executioner of bloodsuckers, forced by circumstance to team up with her prey in *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter: Guilty Pleasures* (issues 1-6 now collected). Adapted from Laurell K. Hamilton's bestselling series of novels, this mega-popular comic – along with Stephen King's *Dark Tower* and Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* – is redefining the floppy market. The story itself is typical tough-girl-with-heart-of-gold fare, and the functional art leans *Danger Girl* by way of Neil Gaiman's *Death*. The real head-turner: spectacular, almost tactile colours by Imaginary Friends Studios. Black velvet, indeed. **GB**



Do you love craft like we Lovecraft? Then you'll love *Cthulhu Tales vol 3*. Notable among the half-dozen tentacles twisting in the latest installment of BOOM!'s always-excellent anthology series is the greytone visual jaw-dropper "What Lies Beneath," a *Treasure Island*-type nautical horror. And only a fool would fail to laugh out loud at the one-page "Waiting for Cthulhu," where *The Office* meets Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. **GB**

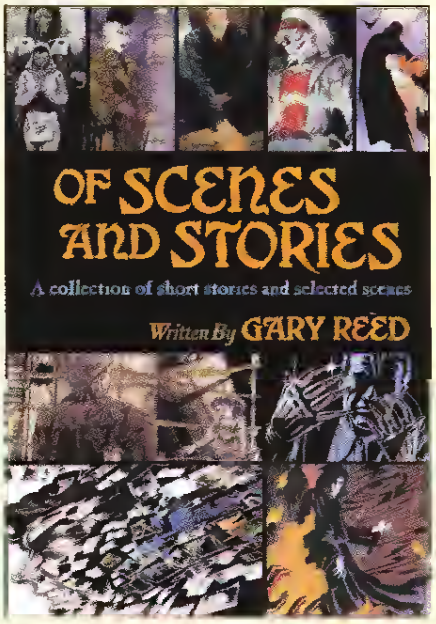


A tale for our times. *Edmund and Rosemary Go to Hell*, wherein married Brooklynites awaken, perambulate, observe society at its worst and realize that life, as is, is Hell, literally. Alas, this otherwise superb book all but fails as a comic. Ironic, given that it's by a *New Yorker* cartoonist! Then again, its precise shortcoming lies in the fact that the book format necessarily obverts magazine-style punchlines, which normally anchor Bruce Kaplan's wispy pencils. Nothing against minimalism – Charles M. Shultz, anyone? – but the visuals add absolutely nothing here. Still: recommended overall because it's so well written and ends with a hellishly brutal truth. **GB**



If memory is its own ghost, then the dark Civil War western *Loveless* is beyond haunted. Writer Brian Azzarello and original series artist Marcelo Frusin developed a brilliant living flashback device that sees past and present constantly overlapping within the same panels, leaving even the canniest reader to question what truly distinguishes the two. Death and its denial grace almost every cover in this savage series – the only word to describe #18's astonishing cover (pictured) is "typical"– and seeing as the supernatural announced its hand in these events on the second page of the very first issue, it's only going to get more astonishing when the fourth story arc launches in issue #20. **GB**

The insightful collection *Of Scenes and Stories* presents comic-book shorts and excerpts written, personally selected and introduced by Caliber Press founder and *Zombie World* creator Gary Reed. The B&W cuts are culled from two prolific decades of Reed collaborating with then-emerging artists, including Vince Locke and Guy Davis. Pulp fans get their fill of every genre from



mystery to war to historical, but the focus is on horror with retellings of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and a blisteringly good *Dante's Inferno*, a eulogy to Poe, and, of course, intelligent zombies. **MM**

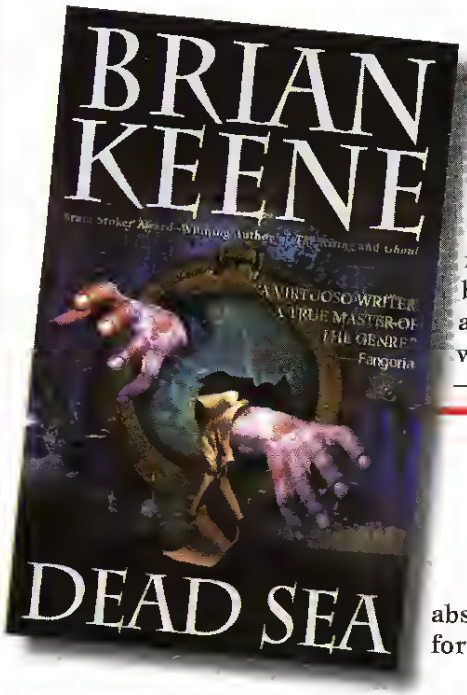
Joining previous Rick Geary historical true crime graphic novels such as *Jack the Ripper* and *The Borden Tragedy*, the artist/writer's latest, *The Saga of the Bloody Benders*, may be his best marriage of narrative and style yet. This time he details the Bender family, who in the 1870s built a one-room inn/grocery store on the Kansas scrub. Here the foursome dispatched travellers via sledgehammer and knife, burying them on the plains. The Edward Gorey-inspired stark line work and stern caricatures are ideal for the harsh, flat setting, making for a chilling prairie Gothic entry in the award-winning artist's meticulous canon. **DA**



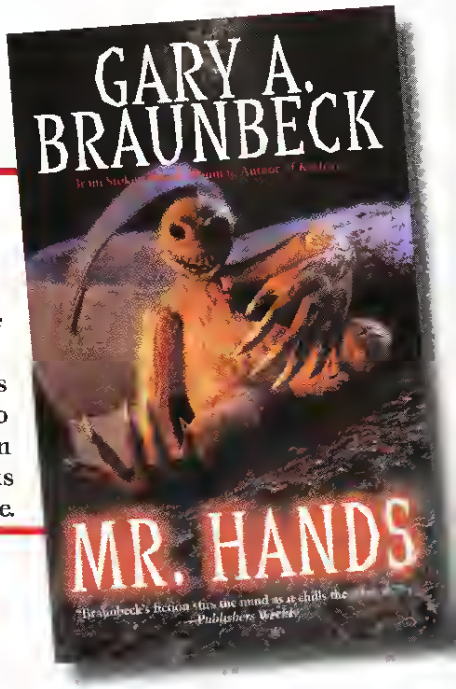




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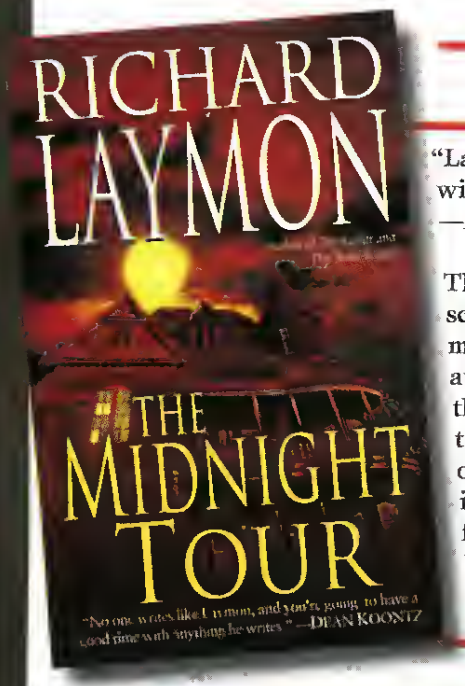


"Keene takes the zombie lore and turns it on its ear. Anything goes in the world of Keene and he just loves to pull the rug from beneath you. If you have not yet picked up a Keene novel, do so now. This guy is the next big thing and he is writing some of the best horror to hit the page in years. I eagerly await each new work from him. He can't write them fast enough for me."
—*House of Horrors*



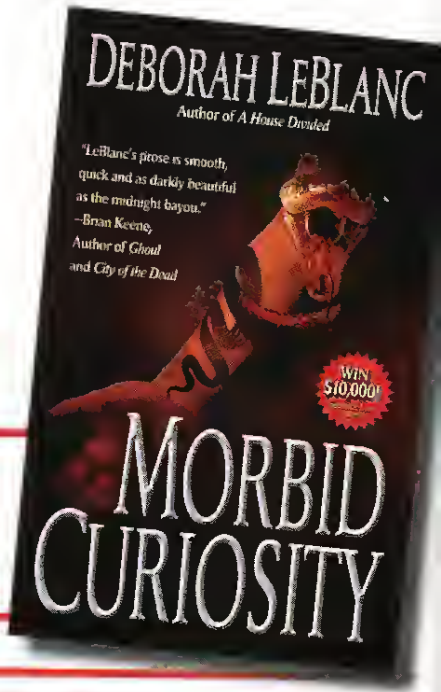
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Highbrow Hitchcock • The Cramps Uncovered • A Historical Horror







Hitchcock and Philosophy: Dial M for Metaphysics

David Baggett and William A. Drumin, eds.
Open Court

If the title of this book makes you recoil in terror because of all those boring university courses you were forced to take, then *Hitchcock and Philosophy* is not for you. But if you are a big fan of the work of Alfred Hitchcock and are sick and tired of the overabundance of psychoanalytical perspectives on his oeuvre, then this collection of academic articles might just be worth your time.

With metaphysics, we are talking about the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of reality and being beyond the world of experience. Questions concerned with mind and matter, determinism and free will, and humanity's place in the universe are central to a metaphysical framework. The authors of this volume argue that while Hitchcock's films are wildly entertaining they can also move us to ask some basic philosophical questions about the meaning of life or the nature of evil in the world.

Hitchcock and Philosophy is divided into five parts, sporting a total of nineteen articles on themes such as chaos in the world, the problem of evil, the pathologies of romantic love, ethics and even an aesthetic consideration of the Hitchcock cameo. Special attention is given to Hitchcock's horror films in section three, though the articles on *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963) are regrettably stale.

For those acquainted with Noël Carroll's classic study of the genre, *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), you will want to read his insightful contribution, "Vertigo and the Pathologies of Romantic Love." While not horror-related, the article develops a non-psychoanalytical reading of *Vertigo* (1958) that will resonate with anyone who appreciates Hitchcock's dark masterpiece of fetishistic desire. Using the philosophy of Aristotle, Carroll reads *Vertigo* as a contrasting philosophical treatise on love that exposes both the positive implications and the darker side of literally "falling" in love.

While this is most certainly an academic text rooted in the discipline of philosophy, it is not overly jargon-y or pretentious. The authors want to argue that Hitchcock's films have moved spectators to think philosophically about the nature of evil or the consequences of falling in love more than any metaphysical textbook. A claim, I might add, that is hard to refute.

Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare

The Cramps: A Short History of Rock 'n' Roll Psychosis

Dick Porter
Plexus

Whatever you wanna call that hit-and-miss offshoot of good old-fashioned rock and roll, horror iconography and snapping hillbilly schtick – psychobilly, shock-a-billy, horrorbilly – no sane observer of the subgenre can deny that the two goo goo mucks that pretty much invented the whole mess go by the names Poison Ivy Rorschach and Lux Interior, better known to casual fans as The Cramps. These delightfully disturbed monsters of rock are the subject of Dick Porter's compact, fiendishly entertaining and lovingly rendered new book *The Cramps: A Short History of Rock and Roll Psychosis*.

Porter charts the history of the well-loved band, from their genesis as the brainchild of B-flick-obsessed, redneck rock-loving, psychotropic drug guru Erick Purkhiser (later to rechristen himself as VipVop, then finally Lux Interior), to their untamed leather and blood punk shows at legendary NYC hot spot CBGB's, to their current role as the self-described grandpappys of schlock rock. There are plenty of rare stills splashed around to stimulate the eyes, but what's really so compelling about Porter's book is how it almost reads as pulp fiction, like the blueprint for the greatest damned warped-rock biopic never made. Even more resonant is how the author manages to paint a surprisingly touching love story between the joined-at-the-hip Lux and Ivy (horror music's Johnny Cash and June Carter) – a pair that truly belong together. Even Cramps fans who swear they know it all will find themselves honestly moved.

Bending a raw '70s punk sound with the



The Grim Reader

THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW
Gris Grimly
Simon & Schuster



Prolific artist/writer/filmmaker Gris Grimly presents a new illustrated tale based on Washington Irving's iconic 1917 ghost story *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Ichabod Crane, Katrina Van Tassel and the Headless Horseman all appear in creative comic book-style panels designed to creep out the kiddies in the dark of night. Essential to your grim, Grimly collection.

Jovanka Vuckovic

THEY HUNGER
Scott Nicholson
Pinnacle



In this fast-paced, gory romp, a group of ancient vampires freed from their subterranean prison deep within the Appalachian mountains rise up to attack anybody unlucky enough to be nearby. Kudos to Nicholson for ditching the velvet corsets and European accents that pervade most vampire fiction and opting instead to portray them in their most base and primitive state.

Last Chance Lance

TRIPLE-DARE TO BE SCARED: THIRTEEN FURTHER FREAKY TALES
Robert D. San Souci
Cricket



While it's good to see more writers penning spook stories for youngsters, unfortunately nothing within this new illustrated collection is truly original or unexpected. Most protagonists come to bad ends, and in some tales, such as "Tour de Force," it's even telegraphed. That said, *Triple-Dare to be Scared* still provides some decent entertainment value for kids who dig horror.

Sandra Kasturi



The Cramps: A Short History of Rock 'n' Roll Psychosis: *Lux Interior and Poison Ivy, the sick brain trust behind the influential punk band*

music of the hills and wrapping the whole disturbed package in kinky S&M, off-kilter humour and blood-dripping, pasty-faced EC Comics horror imagery, there really is nothing quite like The Cramps. A sentiment that Porter's book effectively proves still holds true today.

Chris Alexander

The Nature of Monsters
Clare Clark
Harcourt

Sex and mortality had, of course, been intimate bedfellows for centuries before Mrs. Voorhees started carving up horny teenagers; but for Clare Clark's protagonist, sixteen-year-old Eliza Tully, sex is inextricably tied up with the gruesome rites of childbirth – a life-and-death lottery in the novel's 18th-century setting. Cast off by her upper-class lover when he discovers she is pregnant, Eliza is sold by her mother to the apothecary Grayson Black, a mysterious figure with aspirations of scientific greatness and a fascination with "maternal impression" (the idea that intense emotional stimuli experienced by a pregnant woman could end up reflected in the development of the fetus). Trapped in Black's claustrophobic house, and haunted by nightmarish hallucinations, Eliza is tormented by both those around her and her own powerlessness, which is countered only by the overwhelming knowledge that she has to escape.

Clark's prose is morbidly sensuous, vividly capturing the heat, stench and pestilence of London in 1718. Her book is also fascinating for its investigation of the repugnance Eliza develops for her unborn fetus, which she refers to as a "worm" throughout her pregnancy. Clark tests the boundaries of the ideal "maternal bond" by configuring pregnancy and childbirth not as joyful events, but as a parasitic infection steeped with the possibility of a violent, painful, bloody death. Add to that the tortures that Eliza is subjected to by Black (all in the name of science) and the result is a novel in which the unregulated female experience (i.e. life beyond the polarities of virginity and marriage) is historicized as an inherently grim, terrifying one in which men, women, and even your own body can – and will – betray you.

While it's primarily a realist tale, rather than a supernatural one, it still draws on the lengthy traditions of the female-authored



HELLBOY CREATOR MIKE MIGNOLA AND HORROR SCRIBE CHRISTOPHER GOLDEN TEAM UP FOR *BALTIMORE*, AN ILLUSTRATED, UNCONVENTIONAL BLOODSUCKER NOVEL.

Of Vengeance and Vampires

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

What do vampires, a World War I captain and a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen have in common? It may sound like a riddle, but these seemingly unrelated things collide in *Baltimore*, a new illustrated novel from Mike Mignola and Bram Stoker Award-winning writer Christopher Golden that was largely inspired by the Gothic novels of the Victorian era.

"I'm a big fan of old supernatural literature and the further back you go in [it] the less rules and regulations there are about vampires," explains Mignola, who confesses that *Baltimore* (available August 28 from Bantam) is a loving tribute to *Dracula*, but also adds, "I purposely didn't want the Bram Stoker vampire, I wanted a vampire that could be anything. I wanted that kind of fairy-tale logic you get in old supernatural folklore."

Having mined mythology extensively for the *Hellboy* comic book series, it's no surprise that Mignola would return to similar territory for this tale. Originally planned as a comic book, time constraints and various commitments forced him to consider other mediums, so he approached Golden, who'd previously penned a trio of *Hellboy* novels and edited the *Hellboy: Odd Jobs* anthologies.

"I just kind of got the nerve up one day and said, 'what would you think about fleshing this thing out into a novel?'" says Mignola, who provided a mostly complete outline to Golden, but asked him develop a pair of back stories for two of the characters. "I was surprised and thrilled that he said yes, because in a way I was asking him to do all the real work, all the hard stuff."

Golden, however, disagrees: "Mike had the most difficult job, illustrating the thing. I mean, have you seen those illustrations? It was a Herculean task, and he more than rose to the challenge."

The result is a pitch-black treatise on revenge, riddled with atmospheric chiaroscuro drawings that seek not to tell the story so much as create an additional layer of mood. We first meet Captain Henry Baltimore on a nameless battlefield as his unit is slaughtered while attempting to cross no man's land in the dead of night. As Baltimore lies wounded, he watches bat-like creatures feast on his comrades. When one of them crawls onto his chest, he musters enough strength to attack and wound it. It takes offense and the lines of war and vengeance are drawn.

From there, the tale is primarily told through the stories and reminiscences of three of Baltimore's acquaintances, who are summoned to an inn many years later by their friend.

"I liked seeing him [through] other people's eyes; it keeps him more of a mysterious figure," says Mignola. "If we had a first-person kind of narrative with Baltimore or a thing that was much closer to him, then we're getting into his head too much. I wanted him to be, to a large extent, this unknowable character, like the way [*Moby Dick*'s] Captain Ahab comes across, where you don't know what's going on in this guy's head."

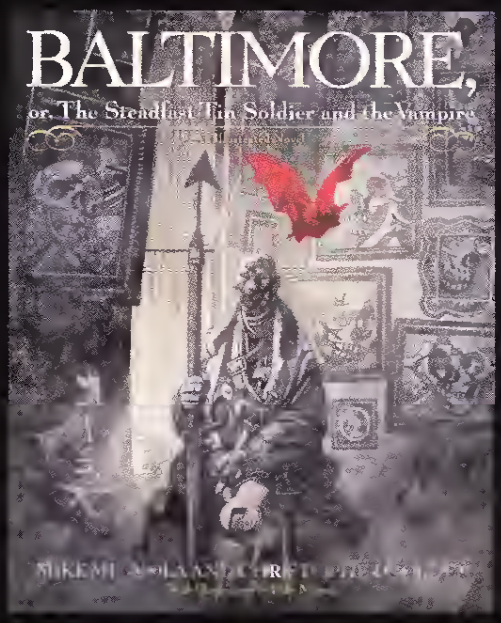
Golden adds, "Among other things, it bridges a gap between man and myth. When we first meet Baltimore, he's very much an ordinary man out of his depth. When next we meet him, he's something far more *and* far less than an ordinary man. He's become something else . . . Even to these men who know him, Baltimore is more than a man – he's a living legend."

A legend made all the more mysterious by the book's clever (and surprisingly effective) nods to Hans Christian Andersen's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*. Quotes from it appear at the front of each of the novel's sections, with additional imagery from the fairy tale woven directly into *Baltimore*'s plot.

"*The Steadfast Tin Soldier* element came a couple months [after the story's inception]. ... It added this nice layer, gave it that something extra," explains Mignola. "[It also] gave me the ending which [was] much more bizarre than anything I could have come up with."

As for the collaboration, both Mignola and Golden agree that the experience was mostly painless, and if *Baltimore* should strike a chord with readers, a sequel is not out of the question.

"I've admired Mike from the moment I first saw his art, but far more once I started to read his stories," says Golden. "His imagination is just totally unfettered. Working with him, helping to bring his ideas to life, was an honour, but more than that, it helped to liberate my own imagination."



Illustrations by Mike Mignola



The Story of Noichi the Blind

Alan Drew, Ph.D. and Chet Williamson
Cemetery Dance

In the back of an antique shop in Tokyo, in a damp cardboard box, under a stack of battered 1950s manga, in a stained manila envelope, lay the manuscript for this book for god knows how many years. The editors date the story, written in English, to roughly the 1930s, and if that's true, then it's no wonder it wasn't published. *Noichi the Blind*'s graphic violence, explicit necrophilia and sexual perversion would have been far too much for English or Japanese audiences of the time. The editors make a half-hearted case for it being a lost Lafcadio Hearn manuscript, but in the end they're forced to admit that it's unlikely.



Regardless of the story's context, it is a highly enjoyable, deeply twisted piece of writing. Noichi is a woodcutter who practices a Zen-like existence, his deep compassion for all living things making him a welcome companion to the animals in the forest. One day he takes in Noriko, a servant girl from the nearby town who has been falsely accused of murdering a samurai captain. Eventually they fall in love and marry. However, their peaceful existence is interrupted when Noriko becomes gravely ill. By the time Noichi returns with a doctor, she is almost beyond saving. Soon she dies, but unfortunately for Noichi, his love for her blinds him to this and he carries on oblivious to the fact that his wife is a corpse. The animals, supremely sensitive to Noichi's problem and wishing to help him in any way they can, do everything in their power to maintain the illusion that Noriko is alive, which the author describes in graphic anatomical detail. All of which takes a turn for the worse when Noriko's corpse gives birth to a demon.

The novella's early fairy-tale tone gives way to a creeping, perverse darkness that grows through several ingenious twists to a bitterly ironic ending. To be honest, I enjoyed this more than I have most Hearn stories, despite the dismissive tone of the editor's postscript. Imagine Takashi Miike's version of *Snow White* and you're almost there.

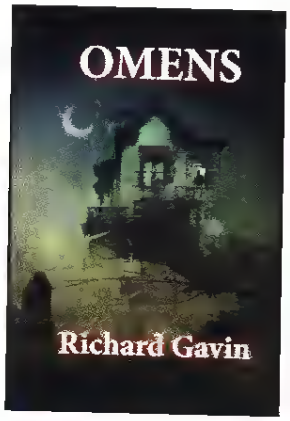
Jason Lapeyre

Gothic novel in its anxieties about physicality, imprisonment, insanity and male authority. The city setting – as opposed to the more traditional castle/mansion in the remote country (think *The Mysteries of Udolfo*) – gives it a contemporary twist and plays on 21st-century ambiguities about urban isolation and loneliness. Clark's novel is Gothic horror at its best: smart, perceptive and deeply, deeply disconcerting.

Justine Warwick

omens

Richard Gavin
Mythos Books



Omens is *RM* contributor Richard Gavin's second collection of brooding tales that, at its best, combines the meticulously crafted prose style and occult overtones of such early 20th-century horror greats as H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur Machen and William Hope Hodgson, but with distinctly contemporary settings and conflicts. Gavin's narrators may occasionally sound like they just arrived from Lovecraft's fictional city of Arkham, peppering their speech with phrases like "sundry accoutrements," but they find themselves confronting mysteries and horrors easily recognizable to today's reader.

In addition, Gavin's narrators tend to be thoughtful loners whose explorations of arcane books, antiquarian shops and old houses launch them into an alternative world of dark mysteries that resist explanation by the comforting truths of modern psychology and physics. In "The Pale Lover," a museum curator befriends the proprietor of a store specializing in occult literature and all manner of fetish pornography and soon discovers, to his horror, the links between the outer limits of sexuality and spirituality. "A Form of Hospice" finds a desperate cancer patient undergoing a radical form of sleep therapy to cure the disease eating his body from the inside, while the goth couple in "Evoking the Horrors" find out the hard way that there is more to darkness than black lipstick, piercings and old Nick Cave albums.

A few of the stories read almost like exercises in style and atmosphere, but for the most part Gavin successfully channels the spirit of his literary influences to create evocative tales that work on the imagination as much as they do on the nerves. The best ones create a sense of mysteries within mysteries and conjure dream-like connections between seemingly inanimate objects and hosts of spirits and demons invisible to all but the sensitive and the insane. But as good as *Omens* is, it may leave readers hungry for more and hoping that in future collections or novels, Gavin will flesh out the strange, compelling worlds too briefly explored here.

James Grainger





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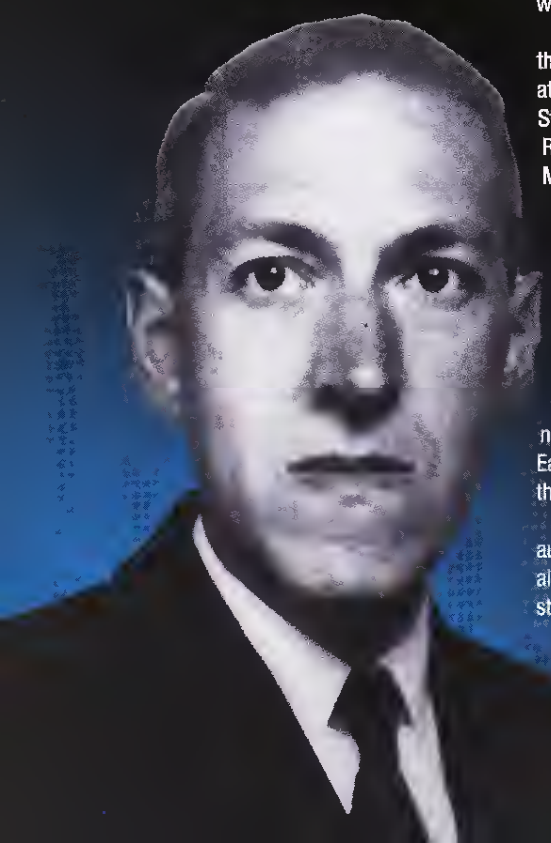
TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

LOVECRAFT'S BRATTLEBORO

BY NICK MAMATAS



Brattleboro, Vermont has been called "a college town without a college." Its pirate radio station, Radio Free Brattleboro, operated with the sanction of the town government until the feds shut it down in 2005. Last year, the former mill town made national news again when teens began congregating in a local parking lot, entirely nude. The main commercial drag even features a hemp-products store named Save The Corporations From Themselves. But beneath the New Age facade, another, older Brattleboro lies dreaming. This is the Brattleboro of H.P. Lovecraft's masterwork novella *The Whisperer in Darkness*, a story of covert extraterrestrial creatures with an outpost in the Vermont hills.



The reclusive author never travelled widely, but in 1927 he visited southern Vermont. Relatively far from the more urban Providence and the New York City he loathed, the author was touched by the locale, writing, "entering Vermont for the first time there is a sense of mystic revivification." The setting stayed with him, as he mused in his travelogue: "Something in the contours, something in the setting, has the power to touch deep violstrings of feeling which are ancestral if one be young and personal if one be old." Lovecraft's Brattleboro still exists, but you have to know where to look.

Only two hours from New York City and just over three from Boston, the small town of 12,000 has attracted many young artists. The former Union Station, a rustic stone building on the National Register of Historic Places, is now the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center and the starting point of downtown Brattleboro. One Amtrak train leaves every morning, and arrives every evening, right around back. Across the street and down the block is the Latchis (pictured above), an Art Deco theatre and hotel built in 1938. The Latchis still showcases its zodiac murals and statuary in the ancient Greek mode, but screens first-run Hollywood fare and art house flicks not normally seen outside of the largest cities on the East Coast. Brattleboro is picturesque in exactly the way Lovecraft would have appreciated.

"I never think of talking about books," the author once told Arkham House co-founder Donald Wandrei, "when I can talk of the stars... or the steep roofs that cluster on the slopes of archaic towns."

The author once knew this town well, and in many ways it hasn't changed. *The Brattleboro Reformer*, a newspaper whose articles are central to *The Whisperer in Darkness*, is still published six days a week. The eight blocks of downtown still fall away into a hilly stillness that flares red and gold in the autumn and deathly white during the long winters. The Connecticut and West rivers still freeze and overflow and the nights still get dark and quiet.

The rolling greenery surrounding Brattleboro was never developed – the slopes and thick tangles of trees and streams defy the grasping demands of ski bunnies and entrepreneurs. Even in 2007, these haunted hills remain a perfect hiding place tor Lovecraft's Mi-Go (alien, brain-snatching creatures that the author described as "a sort of huge, light-red crab with many pairs of legs and with two great batlike wings in the middle of the back.") In fact, this terrain is so timeless that filmmaker Sean Branney, who adapted and co-produced the 2005 silent film version of "Call of Cthulhu" has his eye set on Brattleboro for his own adaptation of the *Whisperer* tale.

If you venture north of the town, you might just happen upon Goodenough Farm, where Lovecraft stayed during his first trip to the area. In a letter to Wandrei, he described it as "a peaked, unpainted farmhouse 150 years old, set with unconscious art on a hillside on the loveliest bit of unspoiled New England country I have ever seen" and later describes it again in "The Whisperer in Darkness."

It served, after all, as the inspiration for the story's Akeley Farm – "a trim white house of two stories and attic, about a century and a quarter old, and with a well-kept lawn and stone-bordered path leading up to a tastefully carved Georgian doorway."

In October 2006, Lovecraft enthusiast Alan Eames led the attendees of the annual Lovecraft in Vermont festival – an event that's future is now uncertain due to Eames' sudden death

this past February – through a circuitous route of country roads to visit the farmhouse. Its actual location remains semi-secret, but the clues are in the story, and there is a Goodenough Road leading out of town into the hills. The current resident of the farmhouse has woken up more than once to find Lovecraft fans, some from as far away as Japan, hanging out on her lawn.

Considering its history, it is also not surprising that Brattleboro is something of a literary centre these days. Four independent bookstores thrive in the crowded downtown centre: The Book Cellar has a literary bent and Everyone's Books is avowedly political, but Brattleboro Books and Baskets Bookstore/Paperback Palace – the two used bookstores – have huge horror sections, and many collectibles that go quickly. "When I get Lovecraft in," Baskets co-owner Sherwood Smith has noted, "he usually leaves the same day."

The Brattleboro Literary Festival is held every October and features bestselling authors from a variety of genres. Comic artist and Lovecraft fan Steve Bissette (*Swamp Thing*, the Stoker-winning *Alien: Tribes*) lives in nearby Marlboro and frequents the town for events such as the annual 24-Hour Comics Challenge (in 2005, Brattleboro had over 50 participants, making it one of the largest of the nationwide events).

And of course, where there are writers, there is alcohol. McNeill's Brewery on Elliot Street, a pub/brewhouse based out of an old Victonan-era firehouse, serves renowned microbrew beers in very casual surroundings. Hippies, loggers, yuppies, college kids and Brattleboro's famed "occasional" drag queen, Alfred, all rub shoulders amidst long wooden tables and sacks of hops. Across the street, the upscale Metropolis offers dancing, a large wine selection, and tasty, if expensive, paninis.

If you get on well enough with the locals over beers and Patriots games, you might hear of the supposedly haunted former whorehouse, or be taken on an illegal tour of the tunnels under the Brattleboro Retreat, a mental health facility that was during the Lovecraft era called the Vermont Asylum for the Insane. It's a rite of passage for local high school kids, and popular among the more daring urban explorers.

There's a vibrancy in the town not typical of horror destinations. Brattleboro, by day, is a quaint, brightly-lit village full of too-friendly rustics and ex-New Yorkers. Then night comes and the hills seem to close in.

If twigs snap and leaves rustle, why couldn't it be an interstellar winged fungal crab looking to shove your brain into a jar?





Lovecraft Lurks: *The Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center and storm clouds preside over the town.*

For tourism information, visit the Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce at 180 Main Street in Brattleboro, call 802-254-4565 or email info@brattleborochamber.org. Detailed driving directions to the town are available at brattleborochamber.org.

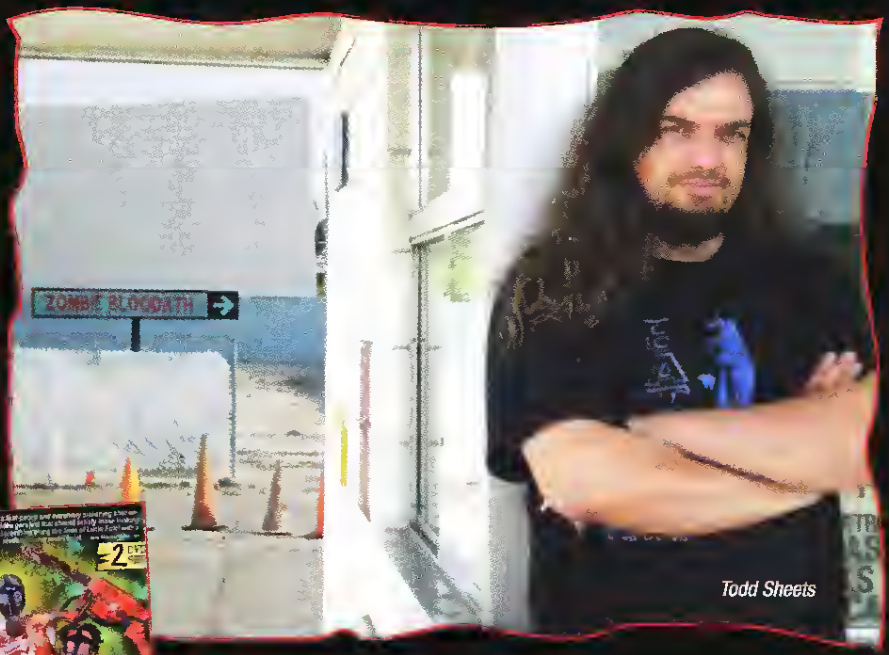






THE GORE-MET MENU

The Gore-met chews the fat with Todd Sheets, creator of the *Zombie Bloodbath* trilogy.



Todd Sheets

Kansas City, Missouri-based filmmaker Todd Sheets is one of the pioneers of independent shot-on-video horror films. Since forming Extreme Entertainment in 1989, Sheets has produced and distributed a whopping seventeen movies. Three of those, comprise the thematically linked *Zombie Bloodbath* series, have recently been reissued by Camp Video in a bargain-priced, splatterific two-disc set.

By today's standards, *Zombie Bloodbath* (1993) is a typical low-budget gorefest. The government paves over the site of a nuclear accident and builds a subdivision on top of it. Years later, lots of zombies (more than 700!) rise and chase around a cast of earnest amateur actors. Tons of cheapjack gore is strung on an otherwise flimsy frame.



Zombie Bloodbath 2: Rage of the Undead (1995) represents a leap in Sheets' technical ability. A satanic cult turns a two-bit criminal into a scarecrow on a dilapidated farm. Fifty years later, a trio of escaped convicts inadvertently resurrects his corpse, unleashing a zombie horde upon a group of college kids and surrounding population centres. It's a stylized gore job with some surprisingly cruel moments and pointed political commentary.

Zombie Bloodbath 3: Zombie Armageddon (2000) is the most ambitious of the set. In the near future, the government fires a space shuttle full of zombies into space. The shuttle is time-warped into the basement of a high school and uncovered by a group of students serving detention, resulting in a *Breakfast Club* meets *Dawn of the Dead* mash-up. This character-driven entry is notable for some early computer-generated FX.

Sheets' enthusiasm for zombies is undeniable, so I had to speak to him.

What is it about zombies that appeals to you as a filmmaker?

My first childhood memory is basically seeing *Night of the Living Dead* at a drive-in theatre. I was hooked and found that I loved all the crazy Italian zombie movies even more. Of course, *Dawn of the Dead* was also a major influence. I did *Zombie Bloodbath* as an homage to these movies. That's why the story is a mix of other zombie films – not to be a rip-off, but to say thank you to all the movies that entertained me as a kid.

How difficult was it to find the number of zombie extras that appear in your films?

It was pretty hard to get the word out at first; people were saying I didn't have a chance and that I couldn't make a movie here in Kansas City. Robert Butler, an arts editor for our local paper, put me on the cover of *Star* magazine, and then – bam! – TV stations took notice and I was on CNN, Fox and MTV. Suddenly I had zombies calling in from all over! We filmed during the great Midwest flood of 1993, and after filming some zombies would go to the river and sandbag to help stop the flooding. Zombies sandbagging, that was a first!

There's a lot of gut-munching in the Zombie Bloodbath films, what are they chewing on?

It's a mix of latex and real stuff we got from our local Price Chopper grocery store. We would talk to the meat cutters; they always had scraps that they threw in big trash barrels. We'd ask for those and get bags of it and keep it on ice. We'd mix it with red food colouring and Mylanta, with a tiny bit of Karo syrup. We would also get an old mirror or pane of glass and brush on thin layers of latex, let it dry and powder it with flour to use as stringy chunks that would stretch and pull.

Tell us about your upcoming projects.

The interest in *Zombie Bloodbath* has led some people to ask me to do a remake with a better budget. But it won't be a typical remake, just in title only. It's a mix of Fulci's *Gates of Hell* and *Ju-on* – Italian splatter meets Japanese horror. I'm also doing *Within the Shadows*, a creepy horror flick shot in a real abandoned asylum that I'm securing a budget for. I have some pretty big names interested in the idea, so we'll see how it goes. Brian Harnois from TV's *Ghost Hunters* is working with me on it.

"WHAT HAVE I BECOME?"



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- Scott Weinberg, journalist, *CINEMATICAL*

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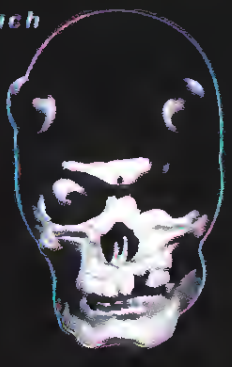
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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY BRETT BAKKER, THE GORE-MET, MARK R. HASAN, MONICA S. KUEBLER AND TREVOR TUMINSKI



BUG **Soundtrack**
Brian Tyler
LIONSGATE RECORDS

Brian Tyler's latest score is a stellar work that shifts into completely distinct musical styles, but forms a striking, albeit experimental narrative. Elegant tracks of grating digital screeching and thumping percussion lard the score, while the main contrasting elements consist of bite-sized techno morsels, a glob of heavy metal and a lulling minimalist title theme played on piano. It's a marvelous collision of genres, and you could characterize the score's juiciest parts as dissonant Ry Cooder propelled by the abstract electronica that made Gil Melle's *Andromeda Strain* such a landmark score. *Bug*'s sonic ties to Melle's crisp, analogue synthetics appropriately conjure visions of cold, mechanical evil that breeds and erupts like a viral colony, and those unsettling, repeated piano solos form a suitable lament for *Bug*'s affected characters. **MRH** ☠☠☠☠☠



SNAKES ON A PLANE **Soundtrack**
Trevor Rabin
VARESE SARABANDE

Recognized for delivering loud, overemphatic music for brain-dead action films, Trevor Rabin's latest work still uses the orchestra and banks of synthesizers like stereo sledgehammers to punctuate "CHASE!," "CORNERED!" and "TERROR!," but he's also become somewhat more adept at crafting nuanced ascension before the bombastic payoff. *The 6th Day* showed he could combine electronica and orchestra with finesse, and *Snakes* at least contains some fun chunks of orchestral tension, with woodwinds and large brass swarming the listener in the excellent "Snake Chaos." While the movie failed to match the massive pre-release hype, Rabin's tongue-in-cheek music won't disappoint fans of contemporary action scores, but therein lies the problem: bereft of any subtlety and ingenuity, like the film itself, *Snakes* is just a horrible cheat. **MRH** ☠☠1/2



SHADOW IN THE TREES **Soundtrack**
Jeff Toyne
MOVIESCORE MEDIA

This debut score by long-time orchestrator Jeff Toyne shows a skilled composer unafraid to develop thematic material with a careful eye on mood-building. "Something's Outside the Tent" is one of a few action-oriented cuts with full orchestra churning towards a shock payoff, however much of the album consists of eerie, low-level suspense cues and some thematic material which helps set up an enveloping sense of dread. There's minor sound design with panned fluttering effects and string vibrato that rumbles from the bowels of your speakers, but the real draw is the interplay between an intimate tragic theme and atmospheric cues where Toyne exploits percussive clusters, shrilling strings, resonating, rumbling tones and women's choir. It's a big-sounding orchestral score that perfectly captures moments of abandonment, and the revisitation of a seething personal tragedy. **MRH** ☠☠☠1/2



BAMBOULA **Psychobilly**
Guilty Pleasures
KAISER

In a genre increasingly dominated by bands that sound the same, Bamboula certainly stands out. *Guilty Pleasures*' artwork has a striking voodoo vibe that matches the music, which is thick with rolling drum beats and "hoo-hah!" chants. But they don't stop there, mixed in are elements of jazz, garage and ska, as well as guitars that go from driving to downright twangy and old school. There's no shortage of horror themes on the disc either, with songs like "Cannibal" and "Thee Infected." Bamboula played their first show only recently, opening for Mad Sin, but from the sounds of this disc, they might just be more talented than your average who-do voodoo fly-by-night psychobilly bands, and one to look out for. Hoo-hah!
BB ☠☠☠1/2



DIEMONSTERDIE **Punk**
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THE CHANGELING **Soundtrack**
Rick Wilkins, Howard Blake and Kenneth Wannberg
PERCEPTO



Unlike *Poltergeist*'s dynamic cacophony or *Ghost Story*'s lyricism, there's nothing but lament, tragedy and a kind of wilting elegance in *The Changeling* score. But as the fat liner notes in this expanded, limited two-CD reissue set detail, like the movie itself, this superb orchestral work wasn't an ordinary undertaking. A US/Canadian tax credit co-production, it begins with British composer Howard Blake (*Amityville 3-D*), who contributed the intricate music box theme. Then, Torontonian Rick Wilkins collaborates with American arranger/music editor/composer Kenneth Wannberg (*Philadelphia Experiment*) on sustained harmonics and repeated suspense motifs, featuring sparse brass, thick strings and low woodwinds with waves of chilling, echoplexed chorals. Wooshing effects, predating Jerry Goldsmith's usage in *Poltergeist*, add to the unsettling mood, though in terms of all-out terror, the standout cue remains Wilkins' own seven-minute "Séance," which hangs in the air like a deathly draft. This is about as haunted as it gets. **MRH** ☠☠☠☠☠



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IMPETIGO Metal

Horror of the Zombies

RAZORBACK



Horror of the Zombies, originally released in 1992, is the second and final full-length from underground death metal pioneers Impetigo. This is a loose concept album based on serial killers and horror films, from obvious titles like "Wizard of Gore," "Trap Them and Kill Them" and "Breakfast at the Manchester Morgue," to revolting odes to necrophilia ("Mortuaria") and food tampering ("Staph Terrorist"). Each track is linked by samples from notorious splatter films and confessions of genuine serial killers. Fuck the post-thrash technical excesses of higher profile contemporaries Morbid Angel or Malevolent Creation, this is brutal, pummelling American goregrind at its finest. This reissue has been remastered for maximum aural carnage and includes a pair of bonus live tracks, copious liner notes from bassist/vocalist Stevo Dobbins and reversible cover art. **GM** ☠☠☠☠☠

Lovecraft, he might really dig Utah horror punk quartet diemonsterdie. With clever lyrical name-checks to *Dead Alive* and family man Charles Manson, not to mention tragic tales of grave-digger girls, half-eaten brains and blood-drenched rock 'n' roll, these monster mashers have thrown all the mandatory ingredients into the genre melting pot. Still, the potion isn't as potent as it should be. Alternating between unsure, off-key vampire doo-wop and unintentionally cartoonish snarling, the vocals come off as weak. While the bonus live footage showcases a gruesomely entertaining show, it seems diemonsterdie's scary masks, searing volume and gratuitous amounts of fake blood don't carry over to its digital keepsake. **TT** ☠☠1/2



CREEPERSIN Gothic Rock/Gothic Folk

Faster Creepersin Kill! Kill! Volume 13 – Folk Songs for the Dead

CREEPSVILLE ENTERTAINMENT

A wise old sage once wrote that you can't judge a book by its cover, but you can tell how much it's going to cost. Suitably, the low-grade artwork of the latest two offerings from Cypress, California's Creepersin, *Faster Creepersin Kill! Kill!* and *Volume 13 – Folk Songs for the Dead*, is a good indicator of their poverty-stricken contents. The discs suffer from homemade production values, and the self-indulgent mumbling that masquerades as vocals just doesn't cut through the mix. *Faster Creepersin*'s rough-edged electric approach and *Volume 13*'s dark, unplugged variation both fail to engage. Largely the work of a husband and wife duo, Creepersin are not untalented, they just lack focus. The well-crafted lyrics and obvious musical potential of tortured artiste Creep Creepersin and his wife, Mrs. Creep do show promise, but listening to their music is just a little too close to sitting through the aural equivalent of a super-cool, goth couple's home movies. **TT** ☠☠

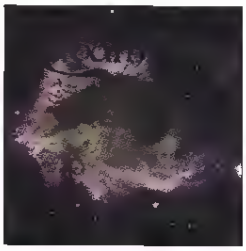


JOHNNY GRUESOME Rock

Gruesome

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Opening with an appropriately moody reading from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner," *Johnny Gruesome* kicks into overdrive with the raucous rocker "Rigor Mortis." This disc, which is something of a concept album, was created as a tie-in to a novel of the same name (to be released by Bad Moon Books this fall), with roughly half the tracks taking their lyrical cues from the story. Easily classifiable as straight-ahead horror rock, with one or two swampier moments including "Graveyard Blues," the subject matter includes monsters, murderers and dismemberment, with kitschy *Day of the Dead* nod "Aunt Alicia" and the sad ballad "Mary Whispers" breaking up the otherwise up-tempo effort. The songs may not always hit their mark musically, but the lyrics are dead clever and so damned much fun, it's easy to imagine this blasting from the stereo of your souped-up hearse. **MSK** ☠☠☠1/2



XCROSS Electronic

Kadath – The Dream Quest

EK BALAM RECORDS

In this aural narrative based on H.P. Lovecraft's novella *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, many of the cues that trace Randolph Carter's travels through spiritual and nightmarish terrain are crafted to evoke more a dreamy than horrific atmosphere. There's never really a sense that something truly terrifying is seething in the background, poised to grapple with the listener in an aggressive, brutal assault. Instead, Xcross' ambitious concept straddles the border between ambient, atmospheric New Age swathes of abstract patterns and repeated chordal or rhythmic mobiles to infer some of Carter's transitory episodes. But *Kadath* is also a smartly designed fusion of vintage synth emulations and contemporary electronica. Experimental concepts are generally fleeting, and the listener is cradled in fairly soothing, luxurious textures, making this a light intro to Lovecraft's epic horror-fantasy tale. **MRH** ☠☠☠





Songs For Sick People

JAYE BARNES LUCKETT'S UNUSUAL SCORES FOR LUCKY MCKEE'S UNUSUAL FILMS HAVE MADE HER A COMPOSER TO WATCH IN THE GENRE. NOW, A CROSS-SECTION OF HER WORK HAS BEEN COMPILED ON CD.

BY MARK R. HASAN

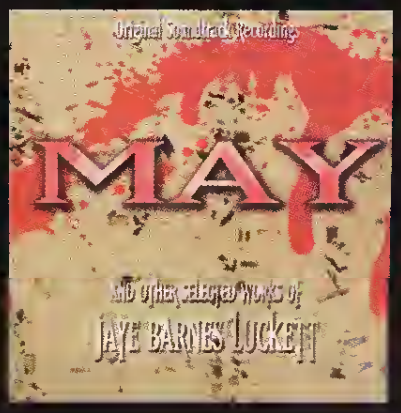
Back in her college years, Jaye Barnes Luckett was known as "the go-to girl" for scoring student films, yet she never envisioned that she'd eventually earn a reputation for being the go-to composer for Lucky McKee's deliciously weird feature-length movies. Now, some of her collaborations with the director – plus other works – have been compiled by La-La Land Records on *May and Other Selected Works of Jaye Barnes Luckett*.

The limited edition 73-minute CD includes, of course, music from McKee's standout film *May* (*RM#34*), as well as a suite of ambient tonalities and discordant sounds from *The Toolbox Murders: As It Was* (a making-of documentary on director Tobe Hooper's remake of *The Toolbox Murders*, which starred frequent McKee collaborator Angela Bettis); tracks from McKee's *Masters of Horror* episode "Sick Girl"; cuts from McKee's first studio film, *The Woods*; and songs from *Roman*, directed by *May* star Bettis and written by and starring McKee (*RM#66*). Many of these cues are available here for the first time.

"We've been in several bands and co-written songs together," Barnes Luckett explains of her easy working relationship with McKee. "Since I'm always involved in the script phase, I also know what he's listening to and watching while he's writing or reworking a screenplay. All he has to say is that *May*'s soundtrack should be like a patchwork quilt, or that "Sick Girl" should incorporate more sound design and give the bug a musical voice as a character, or that he wants to have 1960s schoolgirl chills when he watches the choir in *The Woods*."

This variation of style is exemplified by Barnes Luckett's CD, which offers a smooth balance of vocal and instrumental cues – two distinct types of music that frequently fight for time in a film's final mix and are often composed by wholly different parties. For example, "Prowler," one of *May*'s funky songs, features deep bass and electric guitar, plus silky vocals that scream some of the rage seething within the film's title character; "Stitch," part of several theme variations in the film, is a lethargic synth dirge that succinctly covers the mordant obsessions of the seamstress/veterinary assistant who longs to be loved; and the guitar riffs and sharply descending chords in "Slumber" convey the pressurized, pathological self-hatred inside the spindly anti-heroine.

Like McKee's movies, Barnes Luckett's music often inspires empathy for loners, teens and adults emotionally stunted or downright fractured by childhood traumas – stemming perhaps from the composer's own fascination with tales of "devil-children," like the cruel clique of girls in *The Woods*.



After an ownership shuffle at MGM/UA, Barnes Luckett's score concepts for McKee's troubled studio debut never went further than a series of demo tracks, six of which appear on the CD, including a hip-hop cue with synth celli, a few haunting choral demos, plus the song "Bad Girl" – one of two compositions that made it into the film.

"There's been a lot of confusion surrounding that, for sure," says Barnes Luckett of *The Woods* fiasco. "In a nutshell, it was a case where the director wasn't allowed to use his crew. It wasn't just me, but people in other key roles as well."

Part of the problem may have been that Barnes Luckett's idiosyncratic style is hard to pin down. She cites disparate influences such as Bernard Herrmann, Wendy Carlos, Giorgio Moroder, Beethoven, Gert Wilden, Henry Mancini and even Goblin. Strong melodies and shitting harmonics figure prominently in her writing, and it's pretty overt in songs such as "Zero Hour," one of three written for "Sick Girl." However, her latest score, *Roman*, is perhaps her most sophisticated.

"*Roman* was the most satisfying experience from a creative standpoint," she confirms. "I knew it as it was happening; it's the first feature I've worked on so far where once I got to the stage of working out my ideas, there were absolutely no third-party distractions or interference standing in the way between concept and getting it recorded."

The nine cues from *Roman* that close the CD form a dreamy narrative of ethereal electric guitar and electronic textures, often drawing from the indie songs selected by Bettis. Barnes Luckett points out that working with independent-minded artists such as Bettis and McKee has allowed her to be more "confident, decisive, trusting of intuition and committed" – to genuinely grow as an artist.

McKee, in particular has given her a lot of freedom. She jokes, "As long as I stay away from cowbells, there's room for negotiation with him!"

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



HORRORCLIX: HELLBOY AND ALIEN VS. PREDATOR

Miniature RPG

Wizkids

In 2006 Wizkids introduced the HorrorClix gaming system (*RM#62*), which set a new standard for the way miniature horror RPGs are played. By employing fantastically detailed pre-painted figures with their own "clickable" bases, players use the innovative pieces to dial up and keep track of their strengths and any damage they suffer. Complete with large fold-out playing maps, character cards detailing special abilities, plot twist cards, victim tokens and easy-to-follow rules, it was an instant hit.

Joining the fast-growing collection of HorrorClix monsters are two new character sets featuring familiar faces. The first set includes Hellboy and some of his sidekicks – researchers from the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense, such as Liz Sherman, who can use her fire powers to scorch enemies to a crisp, and Abe Sapien, whose speed and agility come in handy when trying to rescue a victim from the clutches of something evil and slimy.





Also available are figures taken straight out of the *Alien vs. Predator* movie, including the Assassin Predator, who wields a shoulder laser, and the Acid-Tail Alien, who can turn a victim's guts into blood pudding with one quick jab. The sets differ in that the *Hellboy* characters are basically good guys battling monsters and saving people, while the Aliens and the Predators just want to kill everything in sight. Both sets are welcome editions to a game that is already chock full of things that go bump in the night.



DEATH JR. AND THE SCIENCE FAIR OF DOOM

Nintendo DS

Konami

This latest sequel to the original PSP [illegible] the son of Death battling evil forces [illegible] unleashed when a school science fair [illegible] horribly wrong, turning the event [illegible] playground. Now the scythe-wielding hero and his friends must clean up before daddy finds out what happened.

Though it retains some of the fantastic 3-D environments of the original, this entry also switches to a side-scrolling environment that looks cheesy and cheap. The clunky control systems don't help either, as they hinder your ability to easily complete some of the levels, rendering the game tedious and frustrating.

Swinging your scythe and collecting souls gets old fast, especially when your character can die doing simple things such as jumping to a ledge. The soundtrack is mediocre at best and the voice work is almost nonexistent. Please, somebody put Death Jr. out of his misery – fast!



INFERNAL

PC

Codemasters

Trying to block heaven from controlling mankind for all eternity isn't the easiest gig out there. As Ryan Lennox, a fallen [illegible] Satan to battle the powers on high, *Infernal* players take up the unholy gauntlet with the help of an arsenal of sniper rifles and machine guns – not to mention hellish powers of teleportation and telekinesis.

Sounds cool, but unfortunately the game becomes boring quickly. Killing enemies is fun but then you have to drain their souls to gain ammo, health and renew your powers – all of which takes far too long. The chugging heavy metal guitars over the battle sequences hammer home the repetition as you battle enemies that look and act the same, suffering from a weak, ineffective AI system. There are no extras and no multi-player ability. Once done with it, I suggest you send it straight back to the depths of Hell.

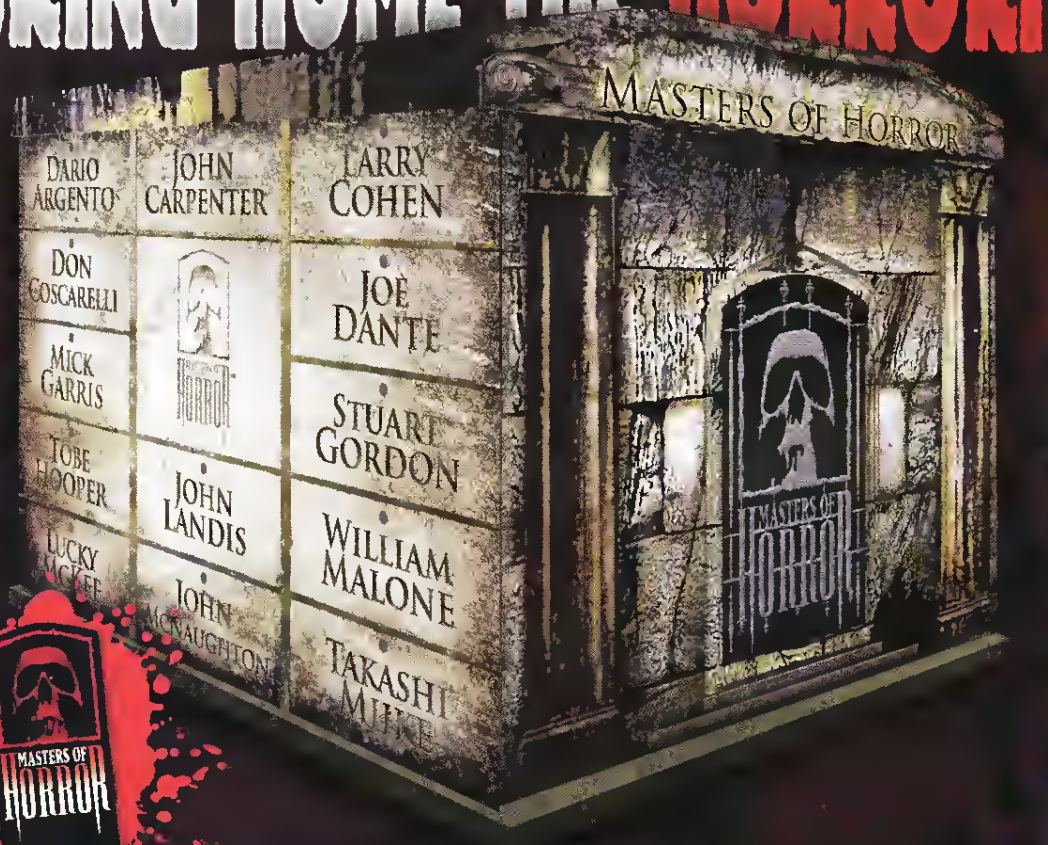

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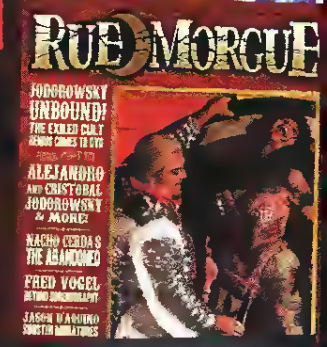
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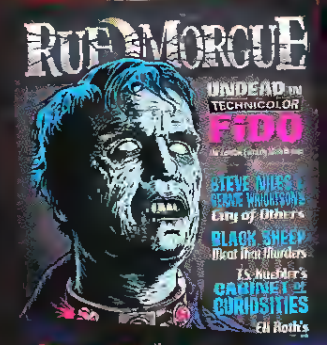
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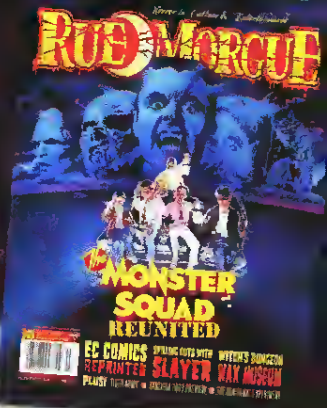
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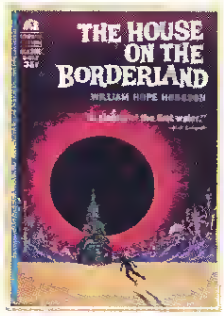
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HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND



William Hope Hodgson
UK – 1908

Two decades before H.P. Lovecraft developed his philosophy of Cosmic Horror, Englishman William Hope Hodgson (1877–1918) had already set a genre landmark with his classic novel *The House on the Borderland*. Eschewing 19th-century Gothicism, Hodgson combined a thrilling siege narrative with apocalyptic visions that explored themes "beyond the radius of our sight and analysis." While this may have confounded contemporary critics, it made an indelible mark on weird horror literature.

The story begins with an introduction from Hodgson himself detailing an old manuscript he claims to have in his possession. Although some horror craftsmen now overuse this metafiction conceit, Hodgson deftly employed the technique to invoke an atmosphere of dread from page one.

The manuscript is the diary of a "Recluse" whose reliability as a narrator is called into question from the start – a hallmark of weird literature (a catch-all term that was used to describe this type of story before the more modern terms "horror" and "sci-fi" were popularized). The Recluse describes in vagaries his self-imposed exile to an ancient and remote Irish mansion "surrounded by huge, unkempt gardens," a harsh punishment for some mysterious past transgression. He is accompanied by his timorous sister – who serves as his housekeeper – and his loyal dog Pepper, who knows enough to leave him alone during his "dark moods."

The novel can be divided into two distinct and seemingly independent halves. The first is an unparalleled siege narrative as unwholesome humanoids the Recluse calls "swine-things" assault the house nightly from a nearby ravine. By day the Recluse surveys the damage and reinforces defences, by night he clutches a shotgun as the creatures bombard the doors and windows. The swine-things' connection with the natural order is tenuous, their origin and motive for attacking the house unexplained. Their purpose is hopelessly beyond our understanding, and therein lays the tension. As one of the earliest examples of survival horror, this first half features themes of overwhelming attacks and innovative fortitude. Although *Borderland* is not cited as a direct influence, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) and George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) bear remarkable similarities.

Its second half consists of a vivid, slightly psychedelic vision of the lonely end of the universe and the vast and inevitable events that follow. The Recluse's fear shifts to wonderment as he attempts to describe these cosmic proceedings, but like the swine-things, any meaningful import remains out of grasp. He records what is essentially an extended prose poem similar to *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s (1968) famous "Space Gate" sequence or George Pal's *The Time Machine* (1960) as the Time Traveller surges forward through melting aeons. H.G. Wells' 1895 novel, *The Time Machine*, was a likely influence on Hodgson.

The latter part of the story is unique in literature and is often targeted by critics for being oblique and tangential. But Hodgson preempts his detractors with a challenge set forth in the introduction: "The inner story must be uncovered, personally, by each reader, according to ability and desire." And for the patient reader, the shadowy vision that dwells between the two halves of the story reaches the absolute zenith of cosmic horror.

As with Hodgson, Lovecraft's writings are filled with monsters of unknown provenance; *Borderland*'s swine-things being the direct literary forbearers of these otherworldly denizens. Lovecraft's reverence for the novel is clear, and in his critical study *Supernatural Horror in Literature* he wrote that it is, "the greatest of all of Mr. Hodgson's works." In 2003, DC/Vertigo published a *Borderland* graphic novel adaptation illustrated by fan favourite Richard Corben. Hodgson devotee Alan Moore introduced this edition, comparing *Borderland*'s unforgettable effect to that of "a primordial and vintage brandy."

Though brief, Hodgson's life (he was killed during World War I by artillery fire on the eastern slopes of Mount Kemmel near Ypres, Belgium in 1918) was still one most versatile. At various times he had been a sailor, photographer, physical trainer (boxing, weightlifting and judo!) and military officer. As an author his contributions to literature include stories of occult investigator Carnacki the Ghost-Finder, which later inspired Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*, while his epic novel *The Night Land* (1912) has been deemed a flawed masterpiece of the fantastic by admirers such as Clark Ashton Smith and C.S. Lewis. But despite these celebrated achievements, *Borderland* remains Hodgson's most significant work.

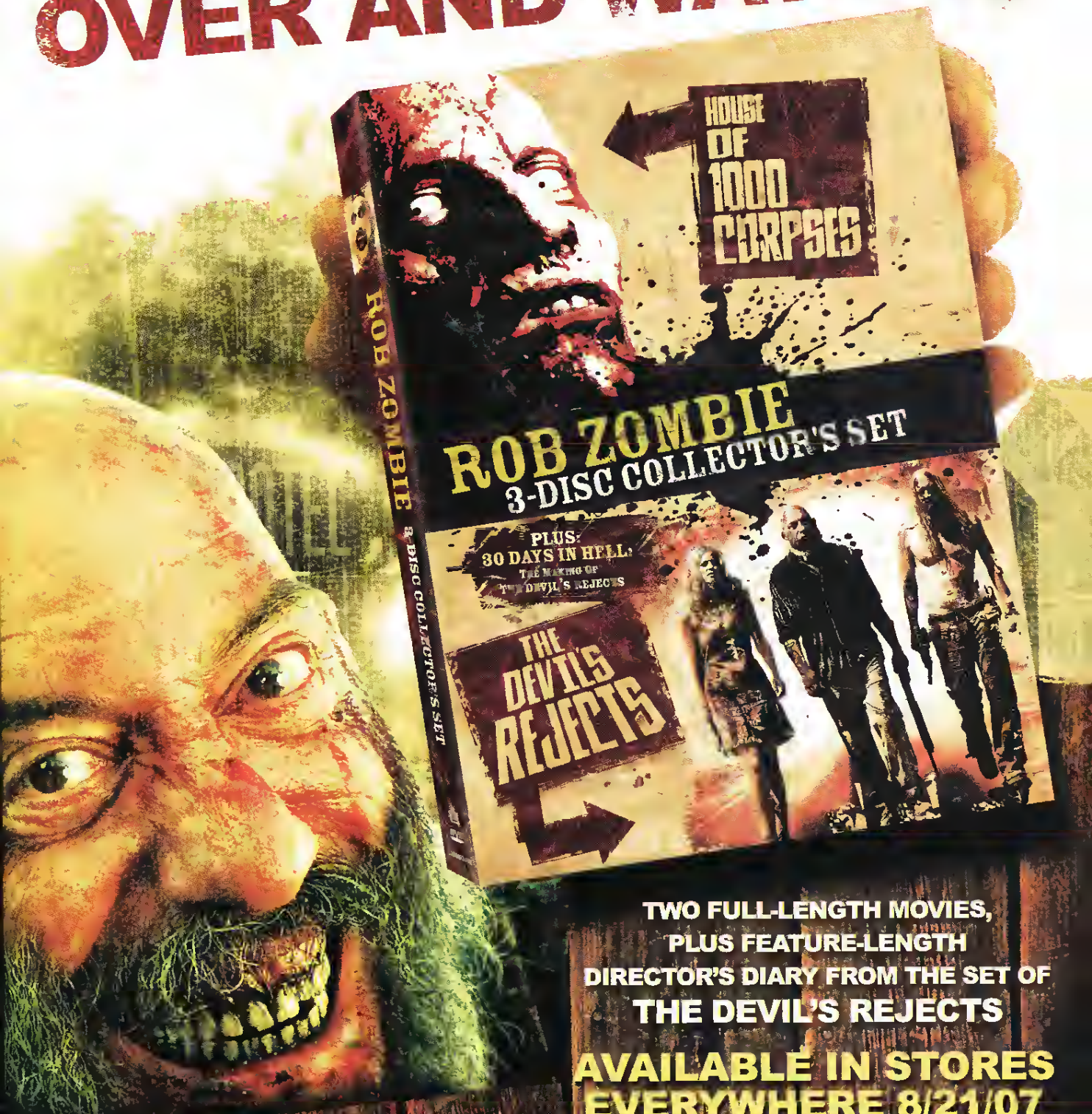
It has been nearly 100 years since the publication of *The House on the Borderland*, and its mysteries and visions beyond time and space still manage to terrify and unsettle modern readers.

Brian J. Showers


William Hope Hodgson

Photo provided by Douglas A. Anderson

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